# MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

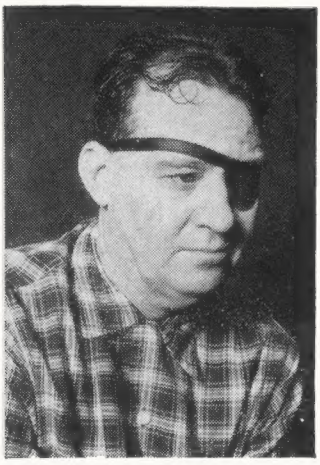
NOVEMBER
35¢

## DEATH TAKES OVER

MIKE SHAYNE
novelet
by
Brett
Halliday

## MURDER by REMOTE CONTROL

A Short Suspense
Novel
By
BORDEN
DEAL



# Off-Beat Down-Beat

Suspense that is just a little on the double-barreled side, that gives birth to one surprise—or, if you prefer, smashing climax—and then goes on to thrill you again by a dark development held in reserve has a great deal to commend it. It heightens the appeal of mystery story writing in general, dramatizes the unthinkable and gives the reader that very special kind of thrill that the adjective "off-beat"—and sometimes "downbeat"—conjures up.

All mystery stories, of course, can't be—and shouldn't be—of this type. But some of the most powerful and entertaining excursions into crime ever written have been double-barreled and super-charged with this unusual kind of blistering, high-voltage suspense and excitement.

This month's issue, we think, runs a little more than usual in that direction and that's precisely why it pleases us so much. There's an edge-of-the-chair mysteriousness about events which you can't quite believe could happen until they do happen with a logic and convincingness that you realize was inevitable from the first. A daring, too, that we like—for when a private-eye stumbles over a corpse he should be in all respects the opposite of bashful, or apologetic.

If you read for pleasure—and smart lads usually do—and lassies too, for that matter—the redhead heartily recommends that you pinpoint this issue for immediate perusal, with no holds barred. He's standing at my elbow as I type and he tells me that he has a special surprise of his own in store for you in DEATH TAKES OVER. And in the famed *Borden Deal's* splendid suspense novel, MURDER BY REMOTE CONTROL.

Brett Halliday

# MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NOVEMBER, 1958 Vol. 3, No. 6

## NEW MIKE SHAYNE NOVELET

DEATH TAKES OVER
*BRETT HALLIDAY* . . . . . 4

## SHORT DETECTIVE NOVEL

MURDER BY REMOTE CONTROL
*BORDEN DEAL* . . . . . 44

## A NOVELET

THE LAST SPOON
*JOHN JAKES* . . . . . 86

## SHORT STORIES

REST IN PEACE
*VIRGINIA PAXTON* . . . . . 33

THE PIGGLY WIGGLY HEIST
*HUBERT PRITCHARD* . . . . . 37

RECITAL
*JOHN SIDNEY* . . . . . 82

ANGELS THAT FALL
*H. A. DeROSSO* . . . . . 102

THE WIFE KILLER
*JOHN P. FORAN* . . . . . 115

ONE EVERY MINUTE
*JOHN DAVID* . . . . . 125

LEO MARGULIES
*Publisher*

CYLVIA KLEINMAN
*Editorial Director*

WALTER P. DALLAS
*Production*

MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE Vol. 3, No. 6. Published monthly by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC., 501 Fifth Avenue, N. Y. 17. Subscriptions, 12 issues $4.00; single copies 35¢. Entered as Second Class matter at the post office, New York, N. Y. Additional entry at Concord, N. H. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1958 by RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC. All rights reserved. November 1958. Printed in U.S.A.
Postmaster—return 3579 to 501 Fifth Ave., N.Y. 17, N.Y.

# *Now—12 Times a Year*

**Yes, Mike Shayne is now a monthly and its big entertainment package of outstanding mystery fiction of all lengths guarantees you the finest in detective fiction reading.**

•

**On your monthly crime jaunt with Mike you will come face to face with the most resourceful of human scoundrels—some cruel, cold killers and others almost likeable.**

•

**But you won't find the redhead making any compromises, ever. He goes after the worst and the not-quite-so-bad with equal ingenuity, and rugged, hard-fisted courage. So take a walk with him every thirty days . . . for top-drawer entertainment that's sure to please.**

**subscribe today**

**RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.**

**501 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.**

Kindly enter my subscription to MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE for 12 issues, one year, @ $4.00. Remit by check or money order.

NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, ZONE, STATE .....

Please print MS—103

ARE YOU JUST "GETTING BY" WHILE OTHER MEN MAKE

# BIG MONEY!

MEN LIKE **YOU** HAVE TURNED THEIR DREAMS INTO DOLLARS WITH TANNERS SPARE-TIME EXTRA-CASH DEAL! . . .

## A 3¢ STAMP PUTS YOU INTO YOUR OWN "SHOE STORE" BUSINESS!

Don't sit on the sidelines! Pick up as much as $60.00 a week extra cash — without investing one penny now or later! And you will . . .

## . . . BE YOUR OWN BOSS AND MAKE IT PAY OFF BIG!

Choose your own hours! Decide yourself when and where you want to work! Work full time or just a few spare-time hours each week. Regardless of what you do now or what experience you've had, you owe it to yourself to get the facts, FREE, on what can be the once-in-a-lifetime opportunity for you! No collections or deliveries to make, no reports to write. You are strictly YOUR OWN BOSS!

**TANNERS SHOE CO., INC.**
**726 BROCKTON, MASS.**

*America's Greatest Line... And No Experience Needed!*

Even if you've never sold anything in your life — you can CASH IN with Tanners! Just SHOW famous Kushiontred Shoes to friends, neighbors, co-workers. (Make big savings on wholesale buying of shoes for your own family, too!) Over 120 styles for men, women, children. Cash Bonus, Paid Vacation Plan, samples at no cost to you! No investment and no obligation! Get FREE information TODAY on the proposition that can change your life!

EXCLUSIVE DISTRIBUTORS OF Flexiclogs AS ADVERTISED IN LIFE

Famous Flexiclogs are in Tanners Catalog — and NOT in any other!

MAIL THIS TODAY!

**TANNERS SHOE CO., INC.**
**726 BROCKTON, MASS.**

Yes, I'll risk a 3c stamp to get FREE information on how to make Big Money — without one cent of investment!

Name_____

Address_____

City_____ Zone____ State____

A

COMPLETE NEW

MIKE SHAYNE

NOVELET

# *DEATH TAKES OVER*

by BRETT HALLIDAY

WHEN MICHAEL SHAYNE strode into the small anteroom of his Flager Street office at the unprecedented hour of nine A.M., Lucy Hamilton stared at him in amazement.

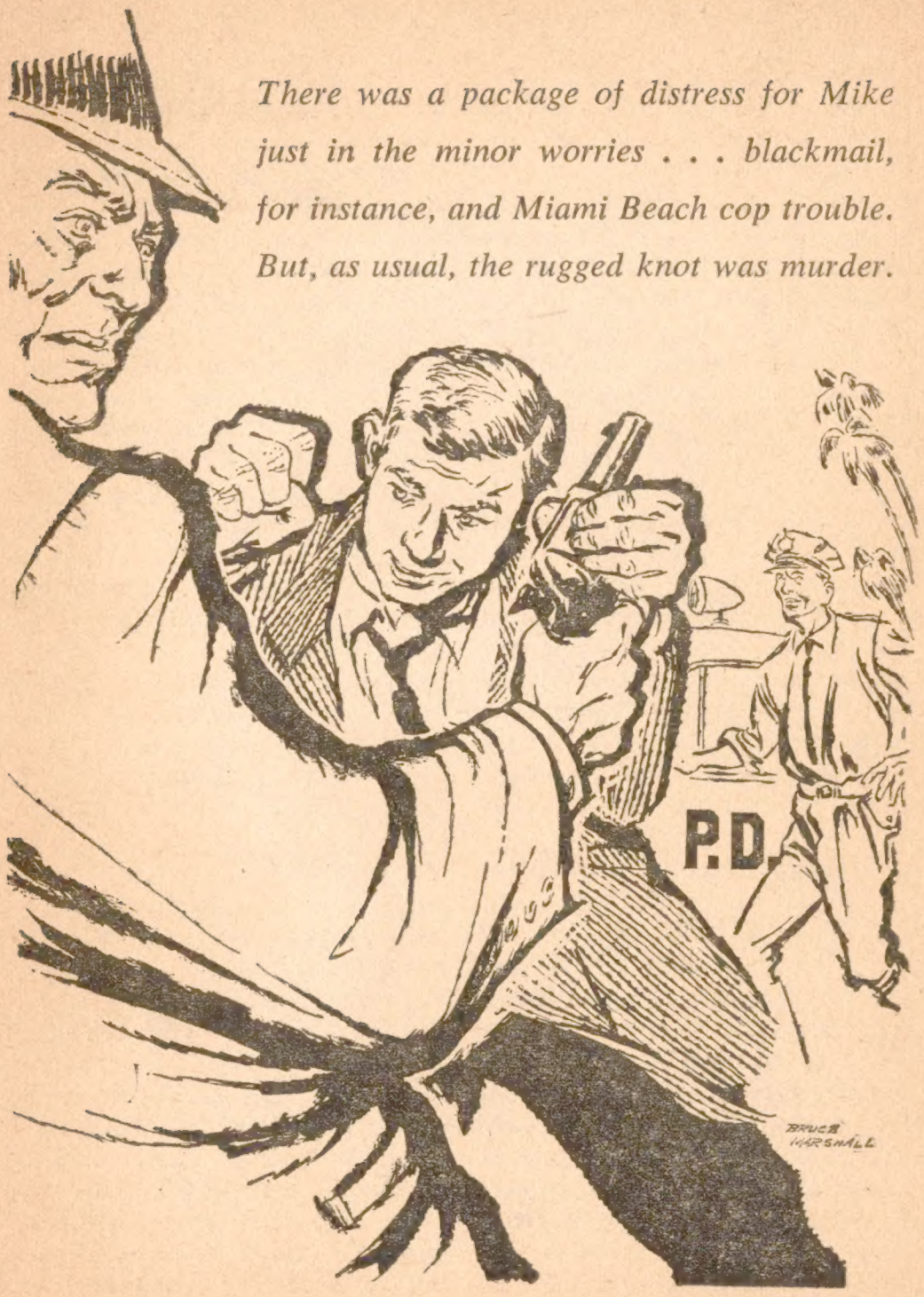
"Michael!" she said. "Haven't you been to bed?"

Shayne dragged off his hat, roughing up his coarse red hair, walked over to the low railing beyond which Lucy sat at her typewriter, reached across and tousled her brown hair.

"Can't a man walk into his own office at opening time without insults?" he inquired. "Why shouldn't I have been to bed? Had a full

© 1958, by Brett Halliday

*There was a package of distress for Mike just in the minor worries . . . blackmail, for instance, and Miami Beach cop trouble. But, as usual, the rugged knot was murder.*



night's sleep, if you must know."

"You're not actually coming to work on time?" his secretary asked incredulously. "Without me even calling to say there's something important."

The redhead grinned at her. "You make me sound like a lazy bum, angel. It's your own fault if I get to feeling that way. If you weren't so efficient, I'd have to put in a ten-hour day here, not to mention night work and overtime."

It was true, he thought, regarding her fondly. Her efficiency allowed him a carefree schedule most office-bound men would envy. She could be depended on to handle routine matters without disturbing either his morning rest or his afternoon pleasure. She knew all his regular haunts, and could be depended on to locate him somewhere and somehow whenever anything urgent came up.

"I didn't mean to get you all keyed up, Michael," Lucy said. "But you don't usually show up so early. There hasn't been any calls or messages, so you don't *have* to stay."

Shayne lowered one hip onto the railing and tugged at the lobe of his left ear. "You trying to ease me out of here?" he asked quizzically. He glanced across the anteroom to the door marked PRIVATE. "You haven't got a man hidden in my office, have you?"

"Michael!" Lucy said, reddening.

The redhead grinned at her, tousled her hair again and rose to move toward his office. He opened the door and entered an empty room with a large, uncluttered desk in the center, a swivel chair behind it and filing cabinets arranged along both sides.

Lowering himself into the chair, he opened the center desk drawer, searched it and shoved it closed again. He searched the top right-hand drawer, shoved it closed too, and finally found what he wanted in the top lefthand drawer. It was a small piece of paper, no bigger than a playing card. After examining it, he grunted, rose and thrust it into his side pocket.

Back in the anteroom, he said, "You won't be able to reach me before noon, angel. George Hubbard has a new boat I promised I'd help him try out. I just dropped by for my fishing license."

Lucy smiled with relief. "So it wasn't work that brought you down so early after all. I'm glad. I was afraid you might be sick." Then her forehead puckered. "You're going fishing, Michael? But you never fish."

"I know," he said. "Which is why I had a devil of a time finding my license. It's just a favor to Hubbard. He's a good client."

He crossed to the railing and leaned his rangy body over it to kiss her lightly on the cheek. Her

brown eyes glowed and her lips parted tremulously when she turned her head to look up at him.

She started to say, "Have a good time, Mich—" when the telephone rang. Lucy Hamilton put the receiver to her ear and said musically, "Michael Shayne's office. Good morning."

Then, in a respectful tone, she said, "Oh, hello, Mr. Davis. Just a moment, please."

Cupping a hand over the mouthpiece, she looked up at Shayne. "Norton Davis."

The redhead's eyebrows raised. Ex-judge Norton Davis was one of Miami's most distinguished practicing attorneys. He was a close friend of many years' standing.

"I'll take it in my office," Shayne said. Striding back to his office, he seated himself and picked up the desk phone. "Morning, counsellor," he said.

The elderly lawyer said in a relieved voice, "Glad I thought of phoning your office, Mike. When I couldn't reach you at home, I couldn't think where to find you."

Apparently Davis was unaware that his words sounded like mild badinage, because there was no humor in his tone.

"What's up?" Shayne asked.

"Mike, Tim Rourke's in jail."

Shayne stiffened in his chair. His reporter friend, Timothy Rourke of the *Miami News,* seemed to have a genius for collecting nuggets of trouble. "For what?" he growled.

"Manslaughter. He's charged with the hit-and-run death of some woman over at Miami Beach. He just phoned me to come over and bail him out, and I thought you'd want to know."

"Hit-and-run?" Shayne said incredulously. "Tim has more sense than to skip the scene of an accident."

"He says it's a frame, Mike. I didn't get any of the details."

"Where is he? Miami Beach Police Headquarters?"

"Yes. I'm going over right now."

"I'll probably see you there," Shayne said. "Thanks for calling."

Shayne's lean face was trenched with anger when he strode back into the anteroom. Slamming his hat on his head, he said almost belligerently to Lucy, "Call George Hubbard and tell him our fishing date is off. Don't make any appointments for me until further notice. No matter who wants what."

Startled by his brusque tone, Lucy's head swiveled to look at him. Her breath caught at the expression on his face.

"What's the matter, Michael?" she asked in an alarmed voice.

"Tim Rourke's in jail over at Miami Beach," Shayne said. "On a phony manslaughter charge."

He stalked out of the office before Lucy could make any comment.

Shayne drove his Hudson into a vacant spot marked "reserved" in the parking lot behind Miami Beach Police Headquarters, and was out of the car almost before the motor died.

Inside the building he marched straight down the hall, past the booking room to a door marked PRIVATE. He slammed it open without knocking and strode in.

Chief of Detectives Peter Painter sat behind a large, bare desk. He was a slender, small-boned man, meticulously groomed. His black eyes glittered with anger when he looked up and saw the redheaded detective.

Before Painter could open his mouth, Shayne growled, "I want to see Tim Rourke. Get him in here."

Peter Painter bounced to his feet. "Who do you think you are, Shayne?" he demanded in an outraged voice. "Busting in here without knocking, and throwing your weight around."

The redhead said flatly, "My license is good in Miami Beach, Painter. I have a legal right to see my client. Get him up fast, or I'll tear your flimsy jail down."

Peter Painter seemed to expand physically, like a bantam rooster fluffing its feathers. "You haven't been engaged by Rourke, shamus!" he said with a venomous inflexion. "He was only allowed one phone call, and he phoned a lawyer."

Shayne's eyes blazed and he took a step toward Painter. A diversion saved the situation from getting out of hand.

From the doorway a deep voice said, "The man's right, Mike. But don't let it worry you. You can sit in on my conference with my client."

Turning to look at the speaker, the redhead's anger faded and he relaxed. The newcomer was a thin, cadaverous-looking man in his late sixties with unkempt white hair and deep lines in his sensitive face. Advancing into the room, he held out a frail, blue-veined hand. "Good to see you again, Mike."

The redhead shook Norton Davis's hand with genuine liking. "How are you, counsellor?" he asked.

The white-haired man gave a perfunctory hello to Peter Painter, then produced a paper and handed it to him. *"Habeas corpus,"* he said. "I've already spoken to Judge Maybank, and he's agreed to hold an immediate preliminary hearing for the purpose of fixing bail."

"Bail?" Painter said, as though he'd never heard the word before.

The lawyer raised thick white eyebrows. In a tone almost insulting in its deliberate patience, he said, "Bail is permissible in homi-

cide cases of less than first-degree, you know. The charge *is* only manslaughter, isn't it?"

The chief of detectives flushed and lowered his eyes to the document, nervously caressing his hairline mustache with a manicured fingernail as he studied it.

Norton Davis said, "I'd like a conference with my client before we go over to court."

Painter finished reading the document, gave Shayne a malevolent look and pressed a button of the intercom on his desk. "Bring Timothy Rourke to my office," he ordered.

## II

TIMOTHY ROURKE looked as though he hadn't spent a very restful night when a uniformed officer escorted him into the office. His suit was rumpled, his hair uncombed and he needed a shave. His eyes had the bloodshot look of a heavy hangover.

A wry smile formed on his thin face when he saw Shayne and Davis. "Turnabout, isn't it?" he said to Shayne. "Usually it's you in a jam and me on the sidelines watching."

Shayne said, "What's this all about, Tim?"

The reporter shrugged. "Ask Painter. He thinks he knows all the answers."

Norton Davis said in his deep voice, "Suppose you give us your version of what happened first, Tim. Then we'll listen to Painter's."

Rourke shrugged. "All right. The dead woman is Mrs. Eleanor Henry. Wife of Theodore Henry. You've probably heard of him."

"Henry Enterprises?" Davis asked with raised brows. "That should make headlines."

"Yeah," Rourke said bitterly. "Only I'm not available to write the story. One of Miami Beach's most prominent citizens. She's the former Eleanor Forbes."

"The tennis star?" Shayne said.

"Former tennis star," Rourke corrected. "She retired from the sport world when she married Henry five years back. The *News* assigned me to do a feature story on her past tennis feats. We met by appointment at the Beacon Inn at nine o'clock last night. Had a few drinks while I interviewed her. Ever meet the woman?"

Shayne and Davis both shook their heads. Shayne said, "I've seen her pictures. Quite a beauty, wasn't she?"

"Still is," Rourke said. "Or rather, was. Even though she was pushing thirty-five. Tall and blonde, and still built like an eighteen-year-old. Shame to destroy a figure like that."

"What happened?" Shayne asked.

"We talked for a couple of hours. Don't know how many drinks we had, but I wasn't drunk.

She was a little tight, though. Not sloppy drunk, but a bit unsteady on her feet."

Painter put in coldly, "You were dead drunk, Rourke. Look at your eyes. You've still got a hangover."

Shayne said roughly, "Wait your turn, Painter."

Rourke said, "My hangover's not from drink. Somebody sapped me from behind. I left her at her car in the parking lot, started to walk toward mine, and the sky caved in."

He fingered the back of his head. "Try sapping yourself unconscious sometime, Painter, and see if it doesn't give you a hangover."

"It wouldn't faze him," Shayne said. "You have to have a brain to get a concussion."

"Now see here, Shayne!" the chief of detectives said, beginning to swell with anger.

Ignoring him, Shayne walked over to examine Rourke's head. The reporter winced when Shayne's fingers probed at his scalp, but there was no discernible swelling there.

"You won't find any mark," Rourke said. "It must have been a leather sap filled with sand or b-b shot. Whoever swung it had a lot of experience in slugging people."

Shayne grunted and returned to his previous position.

"The next thing I remember was a cop shaking me awake," Rourke said. "I was behind the wheel of my car, and the car was in a ditch. I had a splitting headache and I smelled like ten nights in a barroom. They must have dumped at least a pint of ninety-proof Bourbon over me. I didn't have any idea where I was at the time, but later I discovered the ditch was clear down near the bay —a good three miles from the *Beacon Inn*."

"And that's all you know?" Shayne asked.

"Except what they told me when I was booked. Mrs. Henry never got out of the parking lot. She was run over and killed right there. And they think I did it."

Norton Davis said, "Now what's your version, Painter?"

"It's an open-and-shut case," Painter said harshly. "We've established beyond question that Rourke's car killed the woman. She died of a crushed chest, and the tread marks across her body match Rourke's tires. Bloodstains on the sidewalls match the dead woman's blood type. And to cinch it, a fragment of her dress caught on the bumper."

Norton Davis frowned. "All that proves is that his car killed her," he said slowly. "Not that my client was driving it."

"He was dead drunk," Painter said. "The waiter who served Rourke and Mrs. Henry says they drank steadily for two hours. He

estimates they had ten highballs apiece."

Shayne said disgustedly, "Tim Rourke could walk a tightrope with only ten drinks under his belt. Did you give him a drunkometer test?"

"When he was found passed out and smelling like a distillery?" Painter inquired acidly. "I've got two officers who will swear he was as drunk as anyone they ever saw. He still couldn't walk straight when they booked him."

"Then he wasn't drunk," Shayne shot at Painter. "When Tim's drunk, he walks straighter than you do sober. He must have been suffering from concussion."

Norton Davis put in smoothly, "What did you do about investigating my client's claim that he was slugged?"

"Nothing," Painter told him. "He obviously made it up in a naive attempt to wriggle out of the mess."

Shayne said, "Any idea who slugged you, Tim? Or why?"

Rourke shook his head. "*The Beacon Inn* has a big parking lot, Mike. It was jammed with cars, but there weren't any people around. At least I didn't see any. And it's dark. No outside lighting at all. I never saw who hit me."

"Could it possibly have been Mrs. Henry herself?"

Rourke shook his head again. "She was already behind the wheel of her car when I walked away. She didn't get out again, because I heard her motor start just as I got slugged."

"She was inside her car?" Shayne asked sharply. He turned to Painter. "How do you figure she got run over by Rourke in the front seat of her car? You think he drove his in one door, right across the front seat and out the other?"

"No," Painter snapped. "I think he ran over her before she got in her car. Probably he was too drunk even to know he did it."

Shayne turned back to Rourke. "Anything else at all you can tell me, Tim?"

"I don't know anything else, Mike."

"Okay," the redhead said. "I'll see what I can dig up. I'll let you know."

Nodding a goodbye to Norton Davis, he headed toward the door.

"Shayne!" Peter Painter snapped.

Mike paused in the doorway and looked back at the chief of detectives with raised brows.

"You watch your step if you're going to stick your nose in this, shamus," Painter said hotly. "You're in Miami Beach now, not Miami. And you won't get away here with the stuff your friend Will Gentry lets you pull in the city. One illegal trick, and I'll have your license."

Shayne looked the man up and down with no attempt to conceal his contempt. "You wouldn't know

an illegal trick if you saw one, Painter. If it took brains to keep your ears apart, you'd have a head like a lead pencil."

He slammed the door from outside.

## III

THE HENRY MANSION was elaborate even by Miami Beach standards. Shayne was admitted by a uniformed maid and led through a front room which resembled a hotel lobby to a library lined with bookshelves. Theodore Henry sat behind a huge mangrove-root desk. The maid announced Shayne's name and left the room.

The chairman of the board of *Henry Enterprises, Inc.* was a well-built man of forty-five with a strong-jawed face and a full head of black hair just beginning to gray at the temples. He was deeply tanned, and his trim figure suggested that he got plenty of exercise.

He rose when Shayne entered, but didn't offer his hand. Waving the detective to a seat, he said, "As I told you when you phoned, Mr. Shayne, I'm not greatly in sympathy with your mission. There's no doubt in my mind that your client killed my wife, so I'm not particularly anxious to help him. But I'm willing to listen."

Shayne sank into the indicated chair, stuck a cigarette in his mouth and lit it with a paper match. He dropped the match into an ash stand next to the chair.

"You don't look overly upset about your wife's death," he remarked idly.

Theodore Henry flushed. "I'm not accustomed to showing emotion," he snapped. "And I can't imagine what business it is of yours anyway. What do you want?"

"Sit down," Shayne suggested. "I don't like to look up."

After staring at the redhead belligerently for a moment, Henry abruptly sat.

Shayne said, "I assume you'd like your wife's killer caught."

"He has been," Henry said stiffly. "Peter Painter assures me that there's no question about this Rourke man's guilt."

"Peter Painter is a dumb louse," Shayne grated. "Rourke was framed. Which means this wasn't just manslaughter, Henry. It was deliberate, premeditated murder."

Theodore Henry's eyes widened. "That's a pretty strong statement, Shayne. Can you substantiate it?"

"Not to satisfy a court of law. But I know Rourke. He wouldn't drive if he was as drunk as the police claim. He'd leave his car and call a cab. And he wouldn't pull a hit-and-run even if he was loaded. Also, he wouldn't lie to me. He didn't do it."

"Your faith in your client is touching," Henry said ironically.

"But it doesn't convince me the police are wrong."

Shayne said, "I don't give a damn what you believe, Henry. All I want from you is information."

Henry flushed again. "Now see here, Shayne—" he started to say.

The redhead cut him off with a gesture. "Save the indignant act, Henry. Presumably we both want the same thing: to see that your wife's killer pays for his crime. You think the police have him. I say they don't. If you get on your high horse and refuse to co-operate with me, you'll be wondering the rest of your life if the police really got the right man. Play along and you'll be able to sleep nights, knowing you've done everything you could to avenge her. Which way do you want it?"

Theodore Henry scowled at him for several seconds. Then he said grudgingly, "Naturally I wouldn't want the wrong man punished. And I suppose there's a remote chance this reporter is innocent. What do you want from me?"

"First, anything you know about any enemies your wife had."

"She didn't have any," Henry said promptly.

Shayne hiked a shaggy eyebrow. "Everybody has some enemies. Think about it. Who had a grudge against her? Or an imaginary grudge? Were any of her acquaintances a little cracked?"

Henry started to open his mouth, then closed it again. "Cracked, did you say?"

"Off-center. Screwball. Nuts."

"There's one who's certainly neurotic," Henry said slowly. "Though he hardly could be classed as an enemy. Matter of fact, he was in love with her."

The redhead pricked up his ears. "And you knew about it?"

"Oh, it wasn't reciprocated by Eleanor," Henry assured him. "Fellow named George Martin. She knew him before we were married."

"The tennis pro?" Shayne asked.

"Ex-pro. He's near forty now, and hasn't played for years. Quit the game about when Eleanor did, and now is just a sort of gentleman bum. He's always been crazy about Eleanor."

"Why do you say he's neurotic?"

Henry emitted an ironic snort. "The day Eleanor's and my engagement was announced a few years back, he slashed his wrists on the front porch of her beach cottage. Since our marriage, he's written her dozens of pleading letters urging her to divorce me and marry him. He used to phone her until we had an unlisted phone put in. And twice he showed up here personally when I wasn't home and made a scene. Eleanor had him arrested the second time."

"Sounds screwy enough," the

redhead agreed. "Where do I find this character?"

"He has an apartment in Miami Beach." Henry gave him the address.

"Anyone else you can think of who might have had a grudge?" Shayne asked.

Henry shook his head. "Not a solitary soul."

"Did she act worried about anything recently?"

He shook his head again.

"Okay," Shayne growled, punching out his cigarette and rising to his feet. "If you think of anything, will you phone my office?"

"All right." Henry rose too. As Shayne moved toward the door, the executive said with a touch of sarcasm, "You're welcome."

Shayne paused in the doorway to eye him up and down. "Ordinarily my services come high, mister. You're getting a free investigation of your wife's death. And you want thanks on top of it?"

Slamming his hat on his head, he stalked out. . . .

It was three in the afternoon when Shayne parked the Hudson in front of the Miami Beach apartment house where George Martin lived. It was a large, sleek, modern building in a quiet neighborhood. Inside he ignored the self-service elevator and took the stairs to the second floor.

The apartment number Theodore Henry had given Shayne was 223. Locating the door bearing that number, he pressed the signal button. Inside he could hear the mellow sound of musical chimes. After a moment heavy footsteps approached the door and it swung open.

The man in the doorway was as big as Shayne, and once probably had been as leanly muscular. Some of his muscle had gone to fat, though. He was thickening through the waist and had an embryo double chin. He had a round, sullen face with a pouting lower lip. He wore green slacks, a pink sport shirt and yellow straw sandals, suggesting that he might be color blind.

"Yeah?" he inquired ungraciously.

"You George Martin?" Shayne asked.

"Yeah."

"My name's Shayne," the redhead said. "Private detective."

He walked in, and the man fell back to avoid being run over. Shayne pushed the door closed behind him and glanced around the room. No one else was there.

"What is this?" Martin inquired belligerently. "Who you think you are, pushing in like this?"

"I'm investigating a murder," Shayne said. "An old friend of yours."

"Eleanor?" Martin asked in a less belligerent tone.

"Yeah," the redhead said. "You heard about it?"

"It was on the air hours ago. I've already had my cry."

Shayne examined his face without detecting any evidence of grief in it. "I expected to find you with slashed wrists," Shayne said. "According to her husband, you were nuts about the woman."

"That was five years ago," Martin said sullenly. "You get over things. I could have had her back any time I wanted the last six months."

"Yeah? What makes you think so?"

"Henry was through with her. He's got a new doll ten years younger than Eleanor. She came crying about it to me months ago. But it was too late. I didn't want to play any more."

"Who's the new doll?"

"Bette Blade. You'll find her warbling over at the *Beacon Inn.* What's this all about, anyway? I thought they had the guy who ran Eleanor down."

"Just the patsy the killer framed," Shayne told him. "This wasn't hit-and-run. It was premeditated murder. Where were you last night about eleven o'clock?"

"Huh? Hey, you're not gonna hang anything on me, buster."

"I am if you did it," Shayne assured him. "I asked where you were."

"None of your damn business, shamus. Now get out of here before I throw you out."

Shayne gave him a bleak grin.

George Martin's eyes narrowed and he took a step toward the redhead. Shayne waited, balanced on the balls of his feet.

Martin once had been a trained athlete, and he still had his quota of speed and co-ordination. The punch he suddenly threw at Shayne's jaw missed it only by a hair as the redhead jerked back his head just barely in time.

Shayne didn't miss. He sank a left into the man's stomach, and followed it with a right to the jaw. Martin groaned, spun in a half circle and crashed face downward on the floor.

Grabbing the man beneath the arms, Shayne heaved him erect and dropped him into an easy chair. Then he went into the kitchen, found an empty glass and filled it with water. Returning to the front room, he splashed the water into Martin's face.

Martin woke up sputtering. He looked up at Shayne dazedly.

"You're in a spot, Martin," the redhead informed him. "You've got a record of screwball behavior over Mrs. Henry. She even had you arrested once. I'll give you a choice. Come up with an alibi I believe for last night, or I'll drag you downtown by the ears and let you talk it out with Peter Painter."

Martin gingerly felt of his jaw. "I was at *George's Tavern* up the

street from seven till midnight. A dozen people saw me."

"Well, why didn't you say so before?" Shayne demanded.

"I didn't like the way you asked," Martin complained sullenly. He felt of his jaw again. "You want somebody with a motive to kill Eleanor, look up Ed Mowbry."

"Who's he?"

"A two-bit private eye. Got an office in the Blair Building. He's been shaking Eleanor down for months."

"Blackmail?"

"Yeah. He's got a picture. She wanted me to help her steal it from him, but like I said, I was through carrying the torch. I didn't want any part of it."

"What kind of picture?"

"Photostat of a contract she signed years back. When she was nineteen. To play a season of pro softball."

Shayne looked puzzled. "Why'd she be willing to pay off for that?"

"She had a trunkful of amateur trophies. They were important to her. She'd have been stripped of every amateur award she ever got if it came out she was once a pro."

Shayne gave a grunt of understanding and walked out.

## IV

THE LETTERING on the door read: *Mowbry Investigative Service: Confidential Reports.*

Shayne opened the door and entered a cubby-hole office with no anteroom. There was a plain wooden desk, a typing stand, a single file cabinet and one straight-backed chair. A dark, heavyset man with a blue-black jaw and button-sized black eyes sat behind the desk in his shirtsleeves. The sleeves were rolled to expose hairy forearms corded with muscle. He looked up at Shayne.

"Yes, sir?" the man said cordially. Then his cordiality faded as he examined the redhead more closely. "Aren't you Mike Shayne?"

"Yeah," Shayne said. "Are you Edward Mowbry?"

The dark man nodded warily. "That's right. What can I do for you?"

Shayne heeled the door closed behind him. "A little conversation about the woman you were blackmailing, who died last night. Eleanor Henry."

Mowbry slowly rose from his chair. "What do you mean, blackmailing?"

"You've been holding her up over a photostat of a contract she signed as a kid," Shayne said harshly. "A friend of mine's facing a manslaughter rap because she died. I'd rather see you holding the bag."

"I don't know what you're talking about, Shayne. But if you don't get out of here, I'll call the police."

"There's the phone," Shayne said, pointing to it.

Mowbry glared at him, but made no motion to touch the phone.

"What's the matter?" Shayne asked. "Afraid I'd mention your blackmail activities to the police?"

"You've got nothing on me, Shayne. All I know about Eleanor Henry is what I heard over the air. Why would I kill her?"

"She was being interviewed by a reporter," the redhead said. "About her past tennis feats. But you wouldn't have known what they were talking about. Maybe you thought he was digging for the blackmail story. And killed her and framed him to shut her up and sidetrack his investigation."

"You're crazy! I didn't even know the woman."

"No?" Shayne said. He walked over to the file cabinet and examined the drawer labels. The top one read "A-to-H." He pulled open the drawer.

"Hey!" Mowbry said. "What you think you're doing?"

Rounding the desk, he made a grab for Shayne's arm. The redhead stiff-armed him away and began fingering through the file folders. Mowbry jerked open a desk drawer and darted his hand into it. Shayne took one step and kicked the drawer closed on his hand.

Cursing, Mowbry jerked his hand free. Shayne opened the drawer and drew out a thirty-eight revolver. Swinging open the cylinder, he let the bullets dribble back into the drawer, then tossed the empty gun on the desk.

He was turning back toward the file cabinet when Mowbry scooped up the empty gun and swung it in a vicious arc at Shayne's head.

With an irritated frown the redhead ducked under the barrel to let it whistle harmlessly over him, and chopped a hard left into the man's ribs. When Mowbry grunted, Shayne crashed a right to the point of his jaw.

Mowbry's back hit the wall and he slowly sank to a seated position on the floor. When he reached it, he toppled over on his side.

Giving the unconscious figure only a cursory glance, Shayne returned to the file. Almost immediately he found a folder labeled: *"Henry, T."*

It didn't contain what he hoped to find, though. It was the case record of an entirely legal assignment. It seemed that some six months previously Theodore Henry had engaged Mowbry to get divorce evidence on his wife. The record disclosed that Mowbry had shadowed her for six whole weeks. There were carbons of his detailed reports to Henry, and Shayne skimmed over them enough to note that the private detective hadn't been able to catch her in any compromising situation.

Apparently Theodore Henry had given up the idea of divorce then, for the reports abruptly stopped some four and a half months previously.

Shayne checked through the rest of the cabinet without finding the photostat. He searched the desk with equal lack of result. Then he glanced in the waste can and frowned when he saw a small pile of black ashes in its bottom. They were too crumbled to make out what it was that had been burned, but when the redhead touched them, he found they were still warm.

If he'd only been a few minutes earlier, Shayne thought, giving his earlobe an irritable tug. In all probability the ashes were the remains of the photostat. Mowbry must have burned it the moment he heard of Eleanor Henry's death. It would be a logical move, since with his blackmail victim dead, the photostat would no longer be of any use to him, and might be dangerous evidence against him.

Then Shayne frowned again. If he was interpreting the significance of the ashes correctly, Mowbry must have just heard the news of the death. If he was the one who had killed her and had framed Tim Rourke, he would hardly have waited until now to dispose of the photostat. He would have gotten rid of it as soon as possible after the murder.

Giving his earlobe another tug, the redhead moodily contemplated the unconscious figure on the floor. Then he shrugged, strode out of the office and slammed the door behind him . . .

It was seven P.M. when Shayne walked into the *Beacon Inn*.

The place was a typical small night club. The bar ran along one side of a room crowded with tables. Opposite the bar was a miniature dance floor and a raised dais about large enough to accommodate a three-piece orchestra and a vocalist, if they didn't mind crowding. One of the band members was playing quiet dinner music on the piano, but the rest of the group wasn't even on the platform yet.

This early in the evening few of the tables were occupied, and there was only one person beside Shayne at the bar. She was a well-formed brunette of about twenty-five in a low-cut evening gown. She was sipping a coke.

Shayne ordered cognac and ice water, then asked the bartender, "What time does Bette Blade usually get here?"

"She's here now," the man said, nodding toward the brunette.

Shayne swung around on his stool to examine the girl, then picked up his two glasses and moved down the bar to the seat next to hers. She glanced at him, started to look away, then moved her gaze back and studied him with frank interest.

"Aren't you Mike Shayne?" she asked.

"Yeah," he admitted. "And you're Bette Blade."

She gave him a pleased smile. "I knew you from your picture in the papers. I've seen it often. But how do you know me?"

"A sign outside says you're the featured singer."

"The only one," she said with a grin. "And you wanted to meet me. How nice."

"It's a business call, not a social one," Shayne said dryly. "Got a few minutes?"

Her smile faded. "I go on at seven thirty. What is it?"

Shayne offered a cigarette and the girl shook her head. He lit one for himself, took a sip of cognac and followed it with water.

"The reporter charged with running down Mrs. Henry last night is a friend of mine," Shayne said. "I'm trying to clear him."

"Won't that be difficult?" she asked with raised brows. "He's guilty, isn't he?"

"No," Shayne said bluntly. "He was framed. It wasn't hit-and-run. It was deliberate murder."

Her eyes turned round and her mouth formed a small *O*. "You're sure?"

"I'm sure. You see them in here last night?"

She nodded. "They were sitting right there." She pointed to a corner table, well away from the orchestra.

The detective asked, "Notice anyone paying unusual attention to them?"

The girl frowned. "What do you mean?"

"Just what I said. Did any customer seem to be watching them closely? Someone who perhaps left about the same time they did?"

"I'm sure I couldn't say," Bette said primly. "I would have had to be watching them closely myself to notice a thing like that, wouldn't I?"

"Weren't you?"

"Of course not. Why should I?"

"It would be natural," Shayne said dryly. "Since she was the wife of your boy friend."

Bette Blade stiffened. "Says who?" she demanded.

"Says a fellow named George Martin. An old friend of Eleanor's."

"Friend?" she said scornfully. "Old lover, you mean."

"Possibly," he said agreeably. "Anyway, Martin describes you as Theodore Henry's girl. And Henry's been trying to get divorce evidence against Eleanor for months. To marry you, maybe?"

She raised her chin. "I can't see that it's any of your business, Mr. Shayne."

Shayne said with sudden harshness, "A friend of mine got set up as the patsy by whoever killed Eleanor. That makes anything concerning her my business."

She was a little taken aback by

his abrupt change of attitude. After a moment of silence, she said, "Well, I certainly had nothing to do with her death." There was a slight pause before she added, "And neither did Teddy."

"It's Teddy, is it?" he asked with faint irony. "Not Mr. Henry, or even Theodore. What makes you so sure of him?"

"No motive," she said with belligerent confidence. "You said yourself he'd been gathering divorce evidence. He didn't have to kill her to get rid of her."

Shayne gave his head a slow shake. "I only said he'd been trying to get evidence. He gave up months ago. I've seen the file of the detective he hired."

"You mean Mowbry?"

"Oh, you knew about him?" the redhead asked in surprise.

Bette sniffed with contempt. "Teddy fired him months ago. He's not the only private eye in Miami Beach. I happen to know Teddy had all the evidence he needed. If Eleanor had lived, she'd have been served with a subpoena within a week."

"Yeah? Who was the corespondent?"

"George Martin."

Shayne hiked a shaggy eyebrow. "Martin claimed the torch was out. He wanted no part of her."

"Naturally. He wouldn't want you to think he had a motive for murder. If your reporter friend isn't guilty, you can bet your bottom dollar that George Martin is."

"Why?"

"He was so jealous of Eleanor, he'd be capable of murder. He tried to kill himself over her once."

"That was five years ago," Shayne said. "He claims he's cooled since. Anyway, he has an alibi for last night."

She raised her brows. "Then he faked it."

Shayne gave her an inquiring look.

"I *was* watching Eleanor and your friend last night," she said. "And there *was* somebody else watching them too."

"Who?" Shayne asked.

"George Martin. He was glowering at them from the bar the whole time they were here. And he left about two minutes before they did."

## V

WHEN SHAYNE walked out of the *Beacon Inn* fifteen minutes later, he paused in the entrance to the parking lot to look it over.

It was a large lot, capable of handling up to a hundred cars. Dusk was just now falling, but it was easy to imagine how dark the area would be later on. The only illumination was from a neon sign on the front of the building, which cast only a dim glow over part of the lot, and wouldn't reach the back lanes at all. A dozen mur-

ders could have been committed there after dark without anyone seeing them.

The entrance to the lot was flush with the widewalk, however, and was in full view of anyone driving along the street. Shayne was conscious of a police radio car slowing as it neared the spot where he stood, but he paid no attention to it until it drew up to the curb and stopped. Then he glanced over his shoulder just as a uniformed officer got out of the driver's side of the car, and a thick-chested plain-clothes man got out of the other side.

Shayne recognized the plain-clothes man as Detective Tom Grayson, a pet of Peter Painter's with whom the redhead had clashed on a number of occasions. He swung around to face the man just as Grayson drew a thirty-eight revolver and leveled it at him.

"Up with your hands, Shayne!" Grayson snapped.

Shayne let his eyes narrow, but made no move to raise his hands. "What's eating you, Grayson?"

"You're under arrest, shamus," Grayson said with relish. "I said, up with your hands!"

Shayne slowly raised his hands. The uniformed officer moved in to give him a shakedown.

As hands patted his body, Shayne said angrily, "What's the charge, Grayson?"

"Robbery and aggravated assault," Gayson said with pleasure.

The uniformed officer stepped back and said, "He's clean."

With his left hand Grayson drew out a set of handcuffs. "Stick out your wrists."

"Just a minute," Shayne growled. "Who brought these charges?"

"Ed Mowbry, as though you didn't know. He says you forced your way into his office, beat him up and robbed him of fifty dollars."

"Mowbry's sticking his neck out a mile for a false-arrest suit," Shayne said hotly. "I clobbered him in self-defense when he swung at me with a gun. And you ought to know the robbery charge is phony. Why the devil would I knock over that jerk for a lousy fifty bucks? I could buy and sell him."

"Explain it in court, Shayne. You gonna stick out your wrists, or do I conk you?"

With blazing eyes Shayne slowly lowered his hands and pushed them forward. Grayson reached for his right wrist with the handcuffs.

It passed through Shayne's mind that he could probably be out on bail by morning, and probably could eventually beat the false charges Mowbry had brought. The sensible thing would be to go along and phone Norton Davis as soon as he was allowed to make a phone call.

The redhead was in no mood to be sensible, though. A night in jail would not only delay his in-

vestigation, it would give George Martin a chance to run, if he hadn't already started running.

Shayne's left hand moved in a blur of speed to clamp around the cylinder of Grayson's revolver, preventing it from turning, and making it impossible for Grayson to squeeze the trigger. His right hand lashed out in a powerful chop that smashed the thick-chested detective flush on the point of the jaw.

Grayson staggered backward. Falling across the front fender of the radio car, he slid to the ground and lay still. The uniformed officer reached for his gun.

Shayne took a step forward, lashed out again and chopped a second jaw within seconds. The cop dropped without a sound.

Shayne scowled down at the two unconscious figures. Walking over Grayson, he long-legged it toward his car on the parking lot.

Shayne drove straight to George Martin's apartment. Leaving the car parked in front, he took the stairs to 223 and rang the bell. No one answered.

After ringing twice, Shayne tried the doorknob. The door was unlocked.

Switching on a light, Shayne glanced around the front room. It was empty. There were only two other rooms, a bedroom and a kitchenette. Both were empty.

In the bedroom the closet door stood open and a dresser drawer was half open, too, suggesting that Martin had done some hasty packing. He hadn't even bothered to take all his clothing, for a suit still hung in the closet and a couple of clean shirts were in one of the drawers. There were no socks nor underwear, though, except some dirty ones in a hamper in the bathroom.

The man had been in such a hurry, he hadn't even locked the front door behind him, Shayne mused. His flight pleased the detective. In conjunction with his lying about his relationship with the dead woman, and about not being near the *Beacon Inn* last night, it made him a very promising murder suspect.

Returning to the front room, Shayne thumbed through the phone book until he found the number of the *Beacon Inn*. Glancing at his watch, he saw that it was well after eight. With Bette Blade's first performance starting at seven thirty, she ought to be on a rest break by now. He dialed the number and asked to speak to her.

Several minutes passed before the singer's voice said, "Hello."

"Mike Shayne, Bette," the redhead said.

He heard an indrawn breath. "What do you want? Police are all over the place here looking for you."

"I know it," Shayne said calmly. "Listen, are you sure Theodore

Henry had divorce evidence against Eleanor?"

"Of course."

"Who was the private detective who got it for him?"

She was silent for a moment. Then she said, "He didn't tell me that. Except that it was a Miami Beach detective."

"Nuts," Shayne said feelingly. "You expecting to see him tonight?"

"So soon after his wife's death?" she said. "Of course not. I imagine he'll stay home."

"Yeah," Shayne said. "Grieving. Thanks anyway."

He hung up and dialed Theodore Henry's number. The maid answered, and a few moments later Henry came to the phone.

"Mike Shayne," the redhead said.

"Oh yes, Shayne," Henry said coolly. "What's up?" There was nothing in his tone to indicate he knew Shayne was wanted by the police.

Shayne said, "I've established that George Martin was at the *Beacon Inn* last night. He had his eye on Rourke and your wife, and didn't seem too happy about them being together. He left just before they did. Earlier today he gave me a fake alibi for last night, and now he's run for cover."

"You think he killed Eleanor?"

"It looks good," Shayne said. "If I can establish a motive, I'll have enough to put the police on his trail. That's why I'm calling."

"Afraid I can't help you," Henry said. "I told you everything I knew about the man."

"You didn't tell me you were naming him corespondent in a divorce suit."

There was a long period of silence. "Where'd you hear that?" Henry finally asked.

"*Where* isn't important. Were you?"

"Why rake that up now?" Henry said a little coldly. "It hardly matters now that Eleanor is dead. I don't want any more scandal."

"I'm trying to clear an innocent man," Shayne said impatiently. "Martin claimed to me that he wasn't interested in your wife any longer. The testimony of whatever private detective you hired to tail her would prove he was lying. Who was the detective?"

After another period of silence, Henry said firmly, "I'm sorry, Shayne, but I'm not going to tell you."

"Why not?" the redhead asked harshly.

"I don't want any publicity about having Eleanor shadowed. Think what the papers would do with that. They might even start speculating that I could have killed her."

"Not if you actually had divorce evidence," Shayne argued. "That'd be the best defense you could put up. It would prove you had no motive to kill her."

"It would stir up a scandal, you mean."

"Would you let an innocent man go to jail just to avoid a little scandal?" the detective demanded.

"I'm not convinced Rourke is innocent," Henry said. "If he is, prove it some other way beside dragging Eleanor's name in the mud. I'm sorry, but that's final."

He hung up.

Shayne stared at the dead phone with enraged eyes. Then he slammed it back in its cradle and paced furiously up and down the room, tugging at his left earlobe. Coming to a halt at one of the front windows, he stared down at the street below.

Abruptly his anger evaporated. A police car was double-parked next to his Hudson, and a uniformed officer was examining the license plate by flashlight. Fading back from the window, the redhead flipped off the room lights.

He stood still for a moment, considering. His first impulse was to flee by the apartment house's rear door. Then it occurred to him that the police would have no reason to suspect he was in Martin's apartment, for they didn't know Martin had any connection with the case. They would probably assume Shayne had abandoned the car because he knew its description would be included on the A.P.B. out on him. Probably they would cruise the area, hoping to catch him on foot, but it was extremely unlikely that they'd make a house-to-house search.

Bolting the front door, Shayne returned to the window and looked down again. The policeman who had been checking the license was now standing on the sidewalk, looking up and down the street. As Shayne watched, he returned to the radio car, reached through the front window for the mike and began to speak into it. When he finished, he hung up the mike and returned to lean against the front fender of the Hudson. The driver of the radio car backed it into the parking place behind Shayne's car and cut his engine.

Shayne decided that George Martin's apartment was as good a hideout as any. Returning to the phone, he lit a match in order to see the telephone dial and called Tim Rourke's number in Miami. There was no answer.

After letting the phone ring ten times, he broke the connection and called Lucy Hamilton's apartment. She answered immediately.

"Hi, angel," he said. "Have any idea where Tim is?"

"Michael!" she said breathlessly. "It was on the eight-o'clock newscast that you're wanted by the Miami Beach police for robbery and assault. What happened?"

"Never mind," Shayne said. "I have to get in touch with Tim. Heard from him?"

"Not since this afternoon. He

phoned to say he was out on bail. He's probably celebrating his release from jail."

"Start phoning his regular haunts," Shayne ordered. "Begin with the paper. Maybe the night editor can tell you where he is. When you get him, have him phone this number." He read it from the dial plate.

"All right, Michael. How long will you be there?"

"Until Tim phones," Shayne said grimly.

"All right," Lucy said again. "I'll get on it right away. And Michael."

"What?"

"Be careful."

Shayne gave an amused laugh. "You worry about me, angel," he said. "It makes me feel better."

After hanging up, he went to the window to examine the street again. A second radio car had pulled up, and its occupants were talking to the officer who had been leaning against the Hudson's fender. As Shayne watched, the second car cruised slowly away down the street, and the policeman returned to his leaning position against the fender.

Shayne drew down the shades of both front-room windows and turned the lights back on. Prowling through the apartment, he found a liquor cache in the kitchen cabinet. To his pleasant surprise there was a bottle of Three Star Hennessy among the other bottles.

Removing an ice tray from the refrigerator, Shayne made a pitcher of ice water. He carried it, the bottle and two glasses into the front room and set them on the cocktail table.

Then he seated himself on the sofa before the cocktail table, poured three ounces of cognac in one glass and filled the other with ice water. He lit a cigarette, took a long sip of cognac, chased it with water and settled back to wait for Tim Rourke's phone call.

## VI

IT WAS NEARLY nine-thirty when the phone finally rang. Picking it up, Shayne said in a cautious voice, "Hello."

"Mike?" Tim Rourke's voice asked.

"Yeah, Tim. Look, you know the jam I'm in, don't you?"

"Lucy told me. I hadn't caught the newscast. Sorry she had so much trouble tracking me down, Mike, but I didn't know—"

"Never mind that," Shayne interrupted. "How soon can you get over here to the Beach?"

"I can start right now. What's up?"

"The police are roosting all over my car. And I need one. Hold on a minute, Tim."

Laying down the phone, Shayne flicked off the front-room light and drew aside one of the window shades. His car was now gone,

probably having been towed away and impounded by the police. The police car was gone too.

Shayne let the shade fall back in place, turned the light back on and picked up the phone.

"No cops in sight now," he said. "It should be safe to pick me up here." He gave Rourke the address of the apartment building. "Just park out front. I'll be waiting for you."

"Be there within a half hour," Rourke said.

While waiting for the reporter to show, Shayne opened the phone book to the yellow pages and began to make a penciled list of private detectives. Because of Theodore Henry's refusal to give him the name of the man he had hired to shadow his wife, Shayne was going to have to contact every detective on the Beach until he found the right one. As their offices would be closed at this time of night, he copied down home addresses.

He had written down two addresses when an underlined address in the book caught his eye.

The home address of Private Detective Edward Mowbry had been heavily underscored in pencil.

Shayne's eyes narrowed. He glanced from the phone book to a small scratch pad lying on the telephone stand. It was blank, but on a hunch the redhead picked it up and carried it to the light.

Apparently George Martin had a heavy hand with a pencil. The impression of what he had written on the previous sheet showed up plainly.

It was Edward Mowbry's home address.

There would be only one logical reason for Martin to copy down the address, Shayne mused. He must have intended to visit Mowbry that night. Shayne copied off the address too, tore off the sheet and thrust it into his pocket.

His plans had abruptly changed. Instead of visiting every private detective on the Beach, he was going to drop in on Mowbry.

Shayne was waiting in the shadow of a tree when Rourke's car pulled up. Quickly he slipped into the front seat next to the reporter.

"Where to?" Rourke asked.

Shayne gave him Mowbry's home address.

As Rourke pulled away from the curb, he asked, "Anybody I know?"

"A private detective," Shayne said. Briefly he gave Rourke what he had learned so far. "According to Bette Blade, it was a Miami Beach detective that Henry hired to shadow his wife," he concluded. "I planned to run down every private detective on the Beach until I found the right one. But I just changed plans. Martin stopped long enough to copy down Ed Mowbry's address before he ran."

"You figure he's hiding out there?"

Shayne shook his head. "The way he spoke about Mowbry, they're hardly friends. He must have planned to visit him for some reason, though. If he's already been there and gone, maybe we can get a lead on where he's holed up from Mowbry. If he hasn't arrived yet, we'll wait around until he does."

Rourke nodded. "Sounds more promising than hunting down a flock of detectives."

Edward Mowbry lived in a small beach cottage just off the bay area. The front-room venetian blinds were closed, but there was light behind them. Shayne and Rourke approached the front door quietly, and Shayne rang.

Mowbry had the door half open before he recognized Shayne. Then he tried to slam it in the detective's face. Shayne threw his shoulder against the door and rammed it back open, driving Mowbry backward in the process.

Shayne waited until Rourke had come in behind him, then heeled the door shut. Mowbry had come to a stop in the center of the room. Shayne just had time to see from the corner of his vision that another man was seated in an easy chair to one side of the room when his attention was distracted by Mowbry rushing him.

Mowbry took a wild roundhouse swing which might have torn Shayne's head off, if it had landed. It took so long to arrive, though, that the redhead had no trouble parrying it with his left arm.

Shayne drove his right fist straight forward with all the power of his heavy shoulder behind it. It landed flush on Mowbry's nose.

Mowbry reeled backward to trip over a low cocktail table and sprawl full-length on the floor. He pushed himself to a sitting position and gave the redhead a slack-jawed look. Blood began to trickle from both nostrils.

Shayne grabbed twin handfuls of shirt front, jerked the man to his feet and slammed him onto the sofa. Reaching down, he flicked a handkerchief from Mowbry's breast pocket and tossed it into his lap.

"Won't you ever learn?" Shayne inquired. "You keep swinging at me, and you'll end up punchy. Wipe the blood off your face."

Dazedly Mowbry dabbed at his rapidly swelling nose as Shayne turned to view the other occupant of the room. The man had remained quietly seated during all the action, as though it were no concern of his.

"Why, good evening, Mr. Henry," Shayne said with an ironic grin. "You know Mr. Rourke, I believe."

Theodore Henry gave Tim Rourke a distant nod. "What's the meaning of this performance,

Shayne? I understand this is the second time you've assaulted Mr. Mowbry today. What are you trying to prove? That you have big muscles?"

"Guess I'm a roughneck," Shayne agreed amicably. "What are you doing here?"

"I had some business with Mr. Mowbry." He added pointedly, "Business which is no concern of yours."

He started to rise from his chair. "It's finished now, so I think I'll run along."

Moving toward him lazily, Shayne put a big hand against his chest and shoved him back into his chair. "You might think it was your civic duty to report to the police where I am, Henry. Stick around."

Henry stared up at him indignantly, made a motion as though he intended to rise again, then changed his mind and sank back in his chair when the redhead silently rubbed his right fist in the palm of his left hand.

"You keep me here under duress, and I'll report you to the police," Henry threatened.

"You do that," Shayne suggested. "Tomorrow. Meantime, stay where you are."

The redhead turned to Mowbry. "Has George Martin been here?"

Mowbry just stared at him without saying anything. Shayne slouched over to him and reached out a long arm to gather a handful of shirt-front.

Shrinking back, Mowbry held up both hands defensively and said, "Hold it, Shayne! No, he hasn't."

"Then we'll wait," Shayne said. "I think he will be."

No one said anything for a moment. Then Henry said, "What makes you think that, Shayne? What would he want here?"

The redhead shrugged. "We'll wait till he gets here and ask him."

Another few moments of silence ensued. Then Henry said to Mowbry, "We may as well tell him, Ed. He'll know about it as soon as they get here anyway."

"Tell me what?" Shayne inquired.

Henry said tonelessly, "Look in that bedroom, Shayne." He pointed to a door leading off the front room.

Moving over to the door, Shayne glanced through it. Rourke followed for a look, too. Only a dim bedlamp was on in the room.

George Martin lay on the bed, bound hand and foot with clothesline. He seemed to be unconscious.

Shayne scowled an inquiry over his shoulder at Henry.

"He's only asleep," Henry said. "He's been tied up for several hours."

Shayne walked back to the center of the room and stood spraddle-legged before Henry's chair. "Okay, explain it," he said.

"There's nothing much to it," Henry said negligently. "George Martin came roaring out here earlier this evening, yelling that he wasn't going to take the rap for something he didn't do. He wanted to drag Mowbry down to Police Headquarters bodily and force him to confess he'd been blackmailing Eleanor. They had a fight and Mowbry knocked him out. Then he phoned me."

"And you came running. Why?"

"Because it was really my fault that Mowbry had been blackmailing her. I put him up to it, you see."

Shayne merely glowered at him.

"He wasn't blackmailing her for money," Henry went on. "I furnished him with a photostat of a document which, if made public, would have wrecked Eleanor's amateur status and would have forced her to return every amateur cup she ever earned. She was very proud of her tennis record. I thought the phostat would make an excellent lever to force her to agree to a divorce."

Shayne said with disgust. "You're a clever guy."

The redhead's contempt left Henry unruffled. He went on calmly, "She wouldn't bite, so the plan was abandoned. But tonight Martin's accusation put both Mowbry and me in something of a spot. There isn't any question that Mowbry can prove his innocence of Eleanor's death.

"But if to save his own skin Martin tried to cloud the issue by making the blackmail story public, Mowbry could get in a bad jam with the police. He might even lose his license. So he phoned me, and since I was indirectly responsible for getting him in this spot, I came over to discuss strategy with him before we turned Martin over to the police."

"Nice of you," Shayne grunted.

Henry ignored the sarcasm. "Not at all. I was looking out for my own selfish interest. In self-defense Mowbry would have to give the police the real story. And can you imagine what a field day the papers would have with that? Prominent industrialist tries to blackmail own wife. We've been trying to figure a way out for hours. But in the end we decided there isn't any. Martin obviously killed Eleanor, and the only thing we can do is turn him over to the police and tell the whole story."

"And bear the scandal, huh?"

"Yes." Henry's tone suddenly became overly frank. "Another factor in my own decision was that while Mowbry and I were discussing what to do, I came to the conclusion that you were right in what you said over the phone tonight, Shayne. It would be selfish to let an innocent man be convicted just to avoid some scandal. So I've instructed Mowbry to release his file on Eleanor to the police."

"Oh?" Shayne exclaimed.

"He's the detective who got me the divorce evidence. It's all in the file. It will prove Eleanor and Martin have been lovers for months."

"That so?" Shayne asked sarcastically.

The redhead's tone finally began to get to Henry. His frank expression faded. "What do you mean by all the sarcasm?"

"I mean you're a liar," Shayne said bluntly. "I've seen Mowbry's file on Eleanor, and he never came up with a scrap of anything on her. So now the question is, why are the two of you cooking up such a damn lie?"

Henry gave the redhead an indignant look. Mowbry pressed his handkerchief to his nose and morosely looked at the floor.

"I'll give you the answer," Shayne rapped out. "You want to make sure Martin takes the fall for Eleanor."

Swinging on his heel, he marched into the bedroom and over to the bed. Taking out a pocket knife, he sliced through George Martin's bonds. The man's eyes popped open and he stared up at Shayne with fright. The redhead jerked him erect by one arm.

"Listen, Shayne," Martin said rapidly. "I didn't kill her. I guess you've found out by now I was at the *Beacon Inn* last night, huh?"

"Yeah," Shayne said.

"That's why I ran. With my record of tailing Eleanor around, and trying suicide and everything, I wouldn't have a chance. But I swear I didn't do it. Mowbry must have. All I came out here for was to force the truth out of him so I'd get off the hook myself. What I told you about Eleanor and me today was true. I *wasn't* carrying the torch any more."

"Come along," Shayne said, and forced Martin into the front room.

Martin blinked around at the other occupants of the room. Mowbry still sat on the sofa, nursing his broken nose. Henry had risen and was frowning at Tim Rourke, who had placed his back to the front door.

"Theodore seemed inclined to leave as soon as you stepped out of the room," Rourke informed Shayne. "I thought he ought to stay until you could tell him good-by."

Shayne released his grip on Martin's arm and the man started to rub it. The redhead examined Henry for a moment, then turned his attention to the man on the sofa.

"You're a sucker, Mowbry," he rasped.

The private detective stared at him over his handkerchief. He didn't say anything.

Shayne said, "You fake up a case record showing that Eleanor was Martin's mistress, and you're making yourself accessory to murder. Why do you think Henry

wants you to do it, Mowbry?"

Mowbry muttered, "I don't know anything about the killing."

"Probably not," Shayne agreed. "But Henry does. Don't you, Teddy? You didn't have a chance to get a divorce from your wife. You just told your girl friend it was all set because she was getting impatient, didn't you? It was you who sapped Tim and ran your wife over with his car."

"You're crazy!" Henry said loudly. "All the evidence points to Martin."

"Sure, now," Shayne rapped out. "First it all pointed to Tim. You got scared silly when I got on the case. So when you saw an opportunity to shift the frame to Martin, you jumped at it. You figured that would shut me up, and still leave you in the clear."

"You'll have a devil of a time proving it in court," Henry said.

Shayne gave his head a slow shake. "Martin saw you do it, Henry."

There was silence in the room for several heartbeats. Shayne stared steadily at George Martin. The man at first looked back at him blankly, then gradually it seeped in that Shayne was offering him a way out.

He didn't stop to analyze Shayne's motive. He just jumped at the opportunity.

"Sure, I saw you," he blurted at Henry. "I'd just left the *Beacon Inn* and was sitting in my car in the parking lot. I saw you slug Rourke, then slug Eleanor and drag her out of her car. I saw you run over her in Rourke's car. And then you loaded Rourke into his own car and drove off."

Henry didn't stop to think either. If he had, he might have wondered why Martin hadn't immediately run to the police, or why just a few minutes earlier he had been accusing Mowbry. All that penetrated his mind for an unthinking moment was the fact that the thing all murderers fear had happened to him: there had been a secret eyewitness.

"You'll never testify to it in court!" he screamed, flashing his hand to his hip.

Shayne took one long-legged stride and brought an uppercut from the rug just as Henry began to swing up the gun. Henry's feet were lifted six inches from the floor by the blow. He fell back into his easy chair in an unconscious heap.

A loud knock came at the door. Shayne looked inquiringly from the door to Ed Mowbry.

"Probably the police," Mowbry mumbled. "We called them to come after Martin just before you got here."

"Oh?" Shayne said. Walking over to the sofa, he looked down at the man. "Mowbry, you plan to press those charges against me?"

Another knock came at the door. Mowbry looked at Shayne.

"You assaulted me, didn't you?" he said.

"No," Shayne told him. "I just defended myself. About the fifty-dollar robbery, even a jerk as stupid as you must realize how silly that's going to sound in court. I can beat both raps, but I don't like the idea of spending the night in jail. I'm going to give you a chance to get off the hook. When the police walk in, you stand up like a little man and tell them your charges were false. Or I'll sue you into bankruptcy for false arrest."

After mulling this over in silence, Mowbry muttered, "I've got no beef, Shayne. I'll call it off, if you will."

A third series of knocks, this one thunderous, sounded at the door.

"Let them in before they break it down," Shayne said to Rourke.

Peter Painter was the first one inside. He was followed by two uniformed officers. When Painter saw Shayne, his face lit up with delight.

"Grab that man!" he bawled at his subordinates.

Shayne said, "Just a minute, Painter. What's the charge?"

"You know what!" Painter yelled. "Robbery and assault, plus resisting arrest." He snapped at the two officers, who were hesitating either side of Shayne. "Put cuffs on him."

The redhead jerked a thumb toward Mowbry. "Here's the guy who placed those charges, Painter. Before you stick your neck out for false arrest, better check with him."

Painter swung toward Mowbry. "Are you Edward Mowbry?" he demanded.

"Yeah," Mowbry admitted in a low voice, not meeting the chief of detective's eyes. "It was a mistake. I want to withdraw charges."

Painter's slight figure began to swell. "At least we've got you on resisting arrest," he shot at Shayne.

"Arrest for what?" Shayne inquired. "There isn't any charge against me."

Giving Painter a deliberately infuriating grin, the readhead pulled open the cottage door. "Come on, Tim," he said. "Let's get down to headquarters and pick up my car. Then I'll meet you at Lucy's for a nightcap."

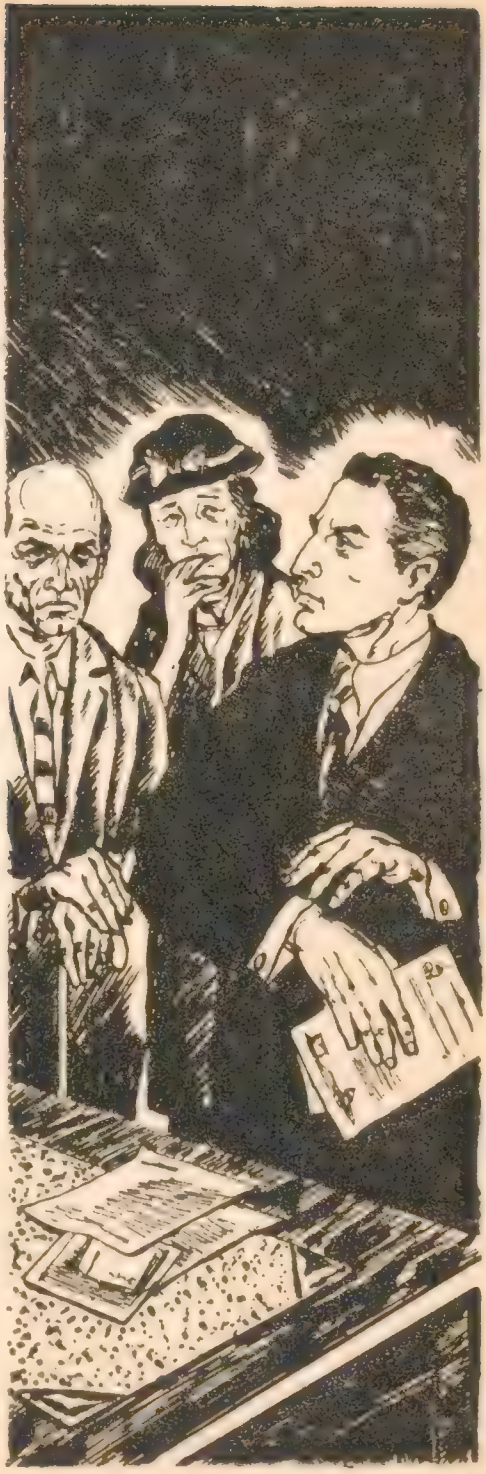
"Okay, Mike," Rourke said

**THE ONLY MAGAZINE *featuring* MIKE SHAYNE *every month***

The old couple seemed
borne down with grief . . .
bewildered . . .
over funeral plans.

# REST IN PEACE

by VIRGINIA PAXTON



At the Kensington Mortuary in Oakland, Ellsworth Kensington himself greeted the hesitant, elderly couple who entered quietly, and stood for a moment as if bewildered, staring apprehensively around them. They seemed, he thought, somewhat over-awed by the magnificent carpets and marble urns, and the subdued hangings on the calm green walls. He had no doubt that they were awed, too, by his unusual presence—by his

© 1958, by Virginia Paxton

wide shoulders, and impressive height and the soothing, professionally subdued voice in which he inquired, "May we help you?"

The woman gave him a bright, bird-like smile, tinged with shyness, and said, "Yes." The stooped man with her, whom Kensington surmised to be her husband, nodded.

"We want to make funeral arrangements," he said.

"Of course. This way, please."

Kensington deferentially seated them in deep comfort across from his desk. Often these older people liked to have matters taken care of in advance, he told himself, rubbing his hands together in quiet satisfaction. One had to take considerable time with them. They made their decisions usually in a slow and somewhat uncertain fashion.

The man was turning his hat in his hands, fingering its brim. "We want to know how much a funeral costs—in general, that is."

Kensington leaned forward and explained with careful enunciation, to guard against the possibility that one of them might be slightly deaf. A funeral had an overall price. The casket was, of course included, along with use of the organ, the hearse, and one limousine.

He elaborated on the personal services of the mortuary and the discreet privacy which was always so great a comfort to the bereaved. Other expenses, he added, such as extra limousines, could be itemized later and would not add substantially to the original estimate. If there were hymns, $5 to $10 for the vocalist, and about the same for the selected minister.

"Suppose we get a few facts down here," he said, with pen poised over the standard form, "while you are thinking over what you might like to have in the ceremony. I presume you are making advance arrangements for yourself, sir?"

"No."

"I beg your pardon. It is then, for you, ma'am?"

"Not . . . not exactly."

They do not like to face up to it, thought Kensington. Probably death is easier to think about in the abstract. He did not press the matter. He simply asked, "May I have your names, please?"

"Mr. and Mrs. Charles Woods."

"My first name is Agatha," volunteered the little woman, in a slightly tremulous voice.

He took down the address. A Napa Valley locale. Just as he surmised from the look of the man's hands. A retired farmer, no doubt, and his wiry, but aging wife still had some of the apple bloom of orchard in her cheeks. A nice couple, all things considered.

"Now," he said gently, "can you tell me for whom these arrangements are intended? We have to fill in the information here, you know."

"It's just . . . a certain person, said Mrs. Woods, evasively.

How hesitant they were. Well, he'd have to get around that, even if it took considerable tactful maneuvering. Still more gently, he asked, "Can you tell me the name of the nearest relative?"

They looked at each other, perplexed. "'Fraid not," said Mr. Woods, gruffly.

"Let me put it this way," said Kensington, patiently. "Is the person right now in a hospital?" It had occurred to him that he could get around the difficulty somewhat by inquiring into hospital records, and singling out the comparatively small number of cases in which the prognosis was extremely dubious.

"Oh, no," said Mrs. Woods.

Kensington felt baffled by their reluctance to give him the smallest clue. To make funeral arrangements for an unknown person with no identifying relatives was at best a peculiar business.

He smiled deprecatingly and changed his approach. "I should tell you, of course, that it is possible to arrange the payment of the total cost of the funeral on terms, at very modest amounts per month, in complete harmony with your budget. We have very lenient terms, you understand."

Woods raised his head. "It won't be necessary," he said, with some pride. "We have plenty of cash to take care of it. As a matter of fact, we can pay for it today when we get it fixed up. We don't want a funeral bill hanging over us after the funeral."

"No, of course not," said Kensington.

"You see," explained Mrs. Woods, "we do know the date of the funeral. It will be June the third."

Kensington put down his pen. A coldness was beginning to encircle the base of his scalp. He smiled, tentatively. "Of course, Mrs. Woods. But we can't ever be really sure of the exact date of passing, can we?"

"Oh, yes," she answered, decisively. "We know. June third. This very year."

Kensington glanced rapidly at the calendar. May the fifteenth. The third of June was only two short weeks away—and they knew? He leaned back in his chair and looked at the Woods again. They seemed to be honest enough. But how could one know . . . unless . . .

He felt as if he had suddenly stepped on stage in a victimized role in "Night Must Fall," or "Arsenic and Old Lace." Could it be that these nice people were planning a . . . a murder? So. All he knew so far was that an unknown person, not in a hospital, with no identifying relatives, was scheduled to die on June third.

He picked up his pen again. "Naturally," he said, "we need to

know the name of the physician who will sign the death certificate. You see, the physician *has* to sign the death certificate, unless, of course, it is an accidental death, and then the coroner steps in."

"If there's a doctor," said Mr. Woods, slowly, "we don't know his name."

"Then how can you be so sure of the date? True, a doctor can often hazard a guess as to how long a gravely ill person will live. But usually it is *only* a guess—and many times the person outlives the prediction."

"We're sure," said Mrs. Woods.

"I see. Possibly you both belong to some psychic group, or have been to an astrologer, and thus have been given a date?"

"We don't hold with that business," said Mr. Woods. "We're both Baptists."

Kensington seized on this new bit of information with avidity. "Then let me note that down. You will want, then, a Baptist minister?"

"Yes," they both said in chorus.

At least he was getting somewhere.

"You have had some kind of dream, perhaps, about a day which might be June third? I am very curious as to how you selected that date."

"We didn't," said Mr. Woods.

Kensington felt as if he had wandered into a maze with no outlet. Double suicide, perhaps? Murder? What went on here? He would have to stop being tactful and be blunt.

"This is very odd," he said. "We have a person unknown, with no facts about relatives, who is not in a hospital nor under a doctor's care, who is not a cultist and yet—on a specified date, June third, that person is to die. Now, Mr. and Mrs. Woods, I do not like to say this. But it is my solemn duty, as the possessor of this bit of information, however fragmentary it may be, to notify the police immediately."

Mrs. Woods said in a terrified voice, "Oh, no!"

Mr. Woods stood up. The lines in his face had become more deeply graven, more set in their tragic sadness.

"Then, *who* is this person?" asked Kensington.

The two looked at each other for an instant. Then Mrs. Woods nodded and Mr. Woods spoke. "We'd hoped not to have to tell this," he said in a low voice, "but it's our son. They're going to put him in the gas chamber at San Quentin on June third."

Kensington was silent. When he spoke it was with a deep sincerity, but the words seemed peculiarly futile. "I'm very sorry," said Ellsworth Kensington.

# The Piggly Wiggly Heist

**by HUBERT PRITCHARD**

*Iron Eyes Odenko had a reputation to uphold. It spelled* effort . . . *all the way.*

As ALL TOO often happens to the retired members of my profession, I found myself embarrassed by overdrafts in my eight checking accounts. My immediate concern, however, was not the dunning form-letters, but the frustrating shortage of cash, since I wanted to attend the twenty-fifth annual reunion of the great Brooklyn Brinks Mob.

I'd been an active member of

© 1958, by Hubert Pritchard

the mob in my youth. In fact, six of us once stole a half million from an armored truck in the days when a half million was real money. The mob members all went into premature retirement at Sing Sing right after that idiot Harold "Orkus" Magoun commissioned the building of a solid teakwood ice-box with the five grand he tried to claim fell on him from a miser's niche in a Canarsie sewer pipe.

The robbery had been brilliantly conceived and executed and over the years the other hoods and I grew to be special friends. A reunion was proposed by Tubes DiFalco, who had piped the laughing gas into the ventilator of the Brinks truck. The suggested location was the old Monchard Diner in Queens, where a dining wing had been added since we'd planned the incidental aspects of the armored car job there.

When Tubes first wrote me about this fine idea I naturally favored it without reservation. But I needed more dough than I had at the time to drive to New York, and put forth the right kind of front when I got there.

An impressive front was a must for me—Iron Eyes Odenko—who once soloed the Business Men's Bank of the Berkshires for forty grand and had a rep to maintain. Two grand would pay for hand-tailored clothes, and presents and leave enough to trail the aura of liberality my former associates knew so well,

But I was badly out of touch with the big city's changing ways. Tubes' letter reached me in Pharr, a sunny Texas town fifty-five miles west of Brownsville where I make a modest living putting up fishing lures and hand-painted *Pysankas* —Ukranian Easter eggs. I needed to promote a little dishonest cash via a bunco job or a heist just to get my hand back in.

With the letter in hand, I walked to the full-length wall mirror in my adobe cottage. I tightened my jaw a bit, letting the eyes glaze over the way they used to. That always got them. The eyes. The victims would see the Steppes of Siberia, the barren cold waste of a remorseless killer's inner determination to let nothing stand in his way.

Which would it be? A good con in uranium stocks, maybe, complete with salted mine and doctored assay reports. No, that wouldn't do. A con mark has to be coddled like a doll, sometimes for weeks, before business talk is even brought up. And the reunion was ten days off.

I got out my old Colt .45, which I nearly had soldered and mounted as a trophy. *A bank,* I thought. A nice small bank with stale cashiers, and fresh money.

The thrill of the chase came back to me when I remembered the two seven-foot policemen in

Meridian, Mississippi, who had chased me with Saluki dogs for nine miles. No, a bank wouldn't do either. I needed at least a wheel man to shove a bank, and these days with all the tear-gas jets and alarms which go off when the teller sweats a little, a bank was high-tension work.

It would have to be a small heist—a store. Store clerks are duller than cake-bake files. They never appreciate the rich experience of being robbed by a distinguished big city professional. Still, on a Saturday night, when the stores in Brownsville are open till nine, there would be upwards of six thousand dollars in any super market till. I was a little ashamed at the idea of stealing money which had paid for baby food and drain stoppers, but I told myself, "What the hell!"

There was a small Piggly Wiggly market out on Highway 67 which probably only took in two or three grand on a Saturday, and closed up with only the cashier and one helper. That would be it. I would get up in the latest disguise, woolly cap-mask and G.I. sweater. I would arrive small, leave big, drive quietly to Pharr and sleep the night away while the police anxiously inspected everybody at their roadblocks.

It took a day to drive to Louisiana and pick up the gear. First, I bought thirty dollars worth of used, and untraceable G.I. clothing. Then I picked up a license plate abandoned in a junk yard, cartridges for the gat, and a case of that terrific Uncle Casebier Barbecue Sauce, made only in Louisiana.

The following Saturday I practiced before the mirror to get the old steely-o into the eyes, and when 8:22 rolled around, I gunned the wagon for Highway 67 and the Piggly Wiggly Market.

It looked like an Egyptian cinch from the moment I walked through the self-opening doors. I filled a roller cart with nothing which might hold fingerprints, then dawdled till the buckle-hammed helper closed the doors and I was the last one there.

"Okay, girlie," I said to the cashier, focusing on her good. "Get your rump off that stool and hand over the money—all of it."

"Wha-at?" she said slowly, like she didn't believe me.

"Never mind all that talk," I said, pointing the big forty-five right at her nose. "This is a stick-up."

I must have looked real weird, like I planned, so no one could identify me. But the bug-eyes peering through the mask seemed to fascinate her. She started to grin. She was a real sweet-looking thing, about as old as my daughter. I knew I was getting soft. I smiled back at her.

*Whappity - lick - smack - smack!* She slapped me across the eyes

with something like a tube of ready-mix biscuits and jerked the gun out of my hand. She kicked open the magazine and ejected the shells. *Ch-Ch-Ch-Ch,* just like that.

"That's the silliest outfit I've ever seen," she said, looking at me like some five-year-old. "Anybody can tell you never held up a store in your life. Here, Pop, take this gun and go home and forget about trying to rob anybody."

"Right," I mumbled. I was mortified.

"Things can't be that bad. Here's some money," she said gently. "In the morning everything will look different. Now, you run along. You're too old to be out this late."

I fled out of that Piggly Wiggly market with tears in my eyes. Oh, I had slipped, all right. Being *caught* would have been infinitely preferable to her not believing I could steal a toothpick from a lumber yard.

I drove home hardly seeing the road, and when I got inside my house, I took a big hooker of Old Mr. Billups Sour Mash. My hands were shaking. I was finished—a has-been. I couldn' face those guys at the reunion. The money I had failed to steal was no longer important. I wasn't going to New York.

Sunday morning the bells from the Iglesia de Jesuchristo seemed to be tolling the end of Iron Eyes Odenko. It was the bluest, blackest day of my life and I sat for hours watching an ant struggle off to his home with a hangnail which I had bitten off and tossed to the ground.

I got to thinking about that girl. Any cheap punk with a hot rod and a hot car could have knocked over that market by simply leaning on it. And if she'd tried jumping him he'd have smashed her face in.

The boys these days are too tough, all rough-neck and no finesse. I thought somebody ought to tell her. Just because she humiliated a decrepit ex-gangster out of holding her up, she'd still better be careful. She was so much like Margie, my married daughter, out in Denver that I felt responsible.

A couple of days later I drifted into the Piggly Wiggly around five-thirty, in my regular clothes. I went over to the cashier's cage where she sat, with the door open as usual.

"You know," I said, "that's dangerous, leaving the cage door unlocked like that. And having only one man to help close up. Somebody might take it into his head to rob you, ha-ha-ha."

"Your voice is famil— Why, Pops!" she burst out. "You look great. Did you get a job?"

"Now, see here," I said. "I'm Iron Eyes Odenko of the great Brooklyn Brinks Mob. In the roaring twenties we hi-jacked an armored car for—"

"My name is Alice Helsing," she interrupted. "And I *know* you

never had a gun in your hand before the other night because on the ranch we used them all the time and we . . . we use them right."

She lectured me in that sweet know-it-all way for five minutes. Finally, I sighed and held up a protesting hand.

"All right, all right. But promise me if you're held up again you'll just do what the crook says, and not risk your life."

"Pops, you're the greatest."

She hadn't listened to a thing I'd said, but at least I'd told her. I smiled and walked to the door. As it automatically swung open for me to pass, the entrance door also swung open. Out of the corner of my eye I saw a couple of kids, no more than sixteen, or seventeen saunter through. Gunnies, on a jumper routine.

This was a slow night and they were pulling maybe a dozen jobs, one after another. Small jobs—one-man filling station, liquor store, market. All pushovers and good for a few Cs apiece. They already had a sackful.

The taller one, a lanky ranch type, flashed a pistol at me. "This is a stick-up," he said real hard. "Get over by the counter, Pop, and lie down on the floor — fast!" His buddy, a wiry black-haired straight man, shoved me away from the door and assisted me down with his shoe.

"Come on, sister," the tall one said to Alice, "put the dough in this sack!"

The Mexican counterman made a try for the aisle and the back exit. Black Hair took a couple of fast steps and chopped him down with a sap, swinging up too high and hitting too hard. He could have killed him with that spring sap. The punks meant business and suddenly I was worried for the girl.

She laughed out loud. "This is too much," she giggled, "first Pop on Saturday, now—"

She never got it out. Lanky Boy slashed her across the face with the rod. He had probably criss-crossed the barrel with a file to make it cut. There was no need to do that. I was angry; bad angry. My eyelids unhinged a bit.

Black Hair should have been watching me. Instead he had one eye on the sack Alice was filling with bills and change; probably didn't trust his partner. Long Shanks had his back to me.

I wriggled a few feet and got a hand on one those roller carts. I shot the cart rattling out past the tall kid with the gun, and at the same time scrambled for his pal. Lanky turned around fast at the noise and threw a slug in the direction of the cart.

I was behind Black Hair before he could blink. I gave him the straight fingers in the throat and chopped down on the sap hand. I had him.

There's no better protection from a gunshot than the big soft pillow a body makes. If Lanky fired at me his buddy would stop the lead.

"Get outta the way, Grampa," he said nervously, "or I'll kill ya!"

I smiled wax, and stared intently at him.

"I'm not kiddin'!" he shouted. But I was giving him the eyes and I knew jelly was replacing his knees. He raised his gun hand a fraction, telegraphing the shot, and I shoved Black Hair at him, spinning to one side.

The gun exploded, the slug tearing into a jug of chili peppers which showered us all with hot, fragrant juice. Tall Boy never got a second shot because he suddenly found himself on the floor, Ukrainian boots tattooing a kazatska on his arm.

I twisted up a handful of their collars and half-dragged both punks toward the door. I looked at Alice, who was holding a handkerchief to her face.

"You see, this ain't no ranch patio. You gotta watch yourself. I'll take care of these punks."

I hustled the bundles of delinquent youth to my car, figuring that Alice had the idea now. There was no need to spoil those boys by hollering for the blues. I had a better idea.

I drove back to my place in Pharr and urged the pair inside the house with a piece of pipe I keep under the car dash, for urging. They were sullen but obedient.

Inside, I grabbed up a meat axe and sunk it into the wall between their heads, keeping hold of the wooden stock. "See this?" I shouted. "This is the hatchet that sent Indian Charley Noteboom to the High Ground when he tried hunting where Iron Eyes Odenko had his tepee staked."

Their jaws opened a little. I grabbed up the scrapbook of the jails I been in and threw it open in front of them.

"In Texas," I said, "there ain't no separate death house for guys going to the electric chair. One night in nineteen thirty-six they had so many on the list to be burned the warden had 'em hold hands like a daisy chain, grounding themselves on my cell door. For a year the only soap we had was made out of the guys whose bodies wasn't called for."

For an hour I laid it on thick, telling them stuff which would chill the marrow of a Muscovite Tern. I'll never know for sure if the effects lasted, but after the scare I'd thrown into them I felt sure they'd stay out of trouble for a while. For a while was about all you could expect.

When I got to New York and the reunion, the whole story of the Piggly Wiggly Heist had the mob standing up to wipe away tears of laughter. Tubes DiFalco pumped my hand and said it made his

heart feel good that old Iron Eyes still had the touch.

A bottle of my Slivovitz stood in front of every man at the table, and I had hired six parolees to bring in flaming swords of Rock Cornish Hen and Shashlick.

Where did I get the dough? Well, that night in Pharr, the terrorized delinquents were so relieved to be turned loose from the Odenko mosque that they left behind their haul. They must have robbed a half dozen places before coming a-cropper at the Piggly Wiggly.

So, seeing as how that money was stolen, it qualified to send an alumnus to the best bunco ball the crooks of Canarsie ever saw.

---

**MIKE SHAYNE—Presents**

**NEXT MONTH'S HEADLINERS**

•

**THE LADY WORE A GUN**

*A Complete Mike Shayne Novelet*

**by BRETT HALLIDAY**

**LAST NIGHT A MAN DIED by CORNELL WOOLRICH**

*A Remarkable Short Suspense Novel*

•

**A HOODLUM IS BORN by RICHARD DEMING**

**THE BRIDGE by DWIGHT V. SWAIN**

**HEAR THE EVIDENCE by MANLY WADE WELLMAN**

MURDER
BRUCE MARSHALL

A DRAMATICALLY SUSPENSEFUL SHORT CRIME NOVEL

# BY REMOTE CONTROL

by BORDEN DEAL

*Shelley was a charming girl . . . and the resort hotel was a Mecca for the sophisticated, a haven of light-hearted glamor. Then murder reared its ugly head . . .*

JESSE JAMES had never had a better opportunity to solve a murder. Through an incredibly lucky combination of events he was on the scene within ten seconds after the body had been discovered. But, this time, Jess was completely baffled.

It all started out very casually, just like any other afternoon in the *Hotel de los Reyes* in Cuernavaca. Jess, since he had come to Mexico, had acquired the habit of adhering to a fine old custom which Mexico is gradually abandoning. He took a siesta every afternoon.

There was a reason for it. He liked to be abroad at night until all the guests were safely bedded down, and since he was the only house detective on the staff, he had to sleep *sometime*. He figured siesta-time was best of all, for then everybody was usually well accounted for. The early hours of the night had been the period chosen last year by the cat-burglar who had systematically raided and ransacked the hotel rooms. So far, this season, there had not been a single theft reported because Jess prowled the corridors until late.

© 1958, by Borden Deal

The mysterious robberies had been the reason for his coming to Mexico in the first place. His friend Charley Fink had built and opened the hotel last season. There had been three major and several minor thefts from the guests, giving the resort hotel a decidedly bad reputation. So Charley had prevailed on Jess's captain back home to relieve him for six months from his duties as a police lieutenant in charge of Burglary Detail.

It worked out fine for Jess. He liked Charley, anyway, and the six months was really in the nature of a vacation. He enjoyed himself, and he was a good house detective. In fact, he seemed almost one of the guests in his casual, urbane manner. There was nothing about him to suggest the usual cigar-chewing, brutal caricature of a house detective, and only a few people knew that he wasn't a paying guest.

This afternoon he had finished his siesta and decided on a sunbath. His tan was coming along nicely and he wanted to further the cause. He slipped into a pair of trunks and went to the roof elevator. He was tall and lean, with good stomach muscles, and an open, pleasant, rugged face. His eyes were brown, the color of his hair, and he had a wide-lipped, friendly mouth.

He stepped out on the roof and started walking toward the sun deck. It appeared to be deserted, as it usually was this time of the afternoon. Jess stopped, looking down into the patio with its circular bar. No one there, either, for this was the slow, hot time of day.

The hotel was built in the shape of a U, enclosing the patio. The sun deck topped his half of the curve, while the other half went up for several more stories. All the suites on the patio had a balcony terrace, their French doors covered by heavy drapes to keep out the heat. Some of the doors were open now, some were closed.

He turned to go on and saw Walter Ring coming toward him. He was wearing shorts, too—a small, compact, muscular little man weighing about one hundred and forty-five pounds. He had muscles like a heavyweight, except in miniature. In addition to the shorts, he was wearing white sneakers, and his brow was filmed with sweat.

"Hello, Jess," he said. "Time for that first *cerveza*. Come on. I'm buying."

Jess hesitated. He'd been looking forward to his sunbath. But he felt he should be pleasant to the guests, and Walter Ring was a very important guest indeed. The muscular little man was the fiancé of Shelley Cornelius.

"Okay," he said, turning to go back down. "Sunbathing?"

"Yes," Walter said. "I fell asleep. I just woke up." He did

look as though he'd lain too long in the sun. His face was red and the perspiration stood on his hairless chest in running beads.

They went down in the elevator, Walter punching the sixth-floor button instead of the lobby. "I promised Shelley I'd wake her when I came down," he said. "We'll take her with us."

"What about the others?" Jess said. "Shall I get them, too?"

Walter wrinkled his nose. "I'd like to go without Laura and Stewart," he said. "If we can manage it. Just once I'd like to have Shelley to myself."

It was the first hint that Jess had that antagonism existed in the ranks of Shelley Cornelius' entourage. While he waited at the elevator, he thought about it idly. He should have expected it, of course. Walter wouldn't like Stewart Turner. He was a big, handsome man and Walter might very justifiably feel that he was competition, even at this late stage. But there was nothing wrong with Laura, even if she didn't stack up to Shelley.

He watched Walter knock on the door down the hall. Shelley was the kind of girl that warmed a man, just by looking at her. She was taller than Walter and she had the honey-tan skin that most girls dream about. She wasn't blonde; her hair was darker than that, almost tawny, with glints of red in it. A beautiful woman. A beautiful woman with money. And Walter Ring.

He watched Walter, a tight, compact little man. Handsome, yes. A good body that he took care of. Good at tennis and boxing and jaialai and women. But you didn't expect people like Shelley to marry people like Walter. Stewart Turner was more her type, all right, with background and money and training in the use of money.

Walter knocked again, and frowned. He put a hand on the door knob and turned it. The door opened and he grimaced at Jess. Then he put his head around it and went softly inside. Jess looked away, whistling what he could remember of the tune of *Tú, Solo Tú.* The *mariachis* had been singing it last night in the patio. *Solo tu sombra fatal, sombra del mal* . . . it was a very sad song, and hauntingly beautiful.

When the voice came, he did not know whether it had been the first call, the second, or the third. "Jess! My God, James, come here!"

He jerked himself into motion. There was an urgent, ragged tenseness in the voice that sawed at his nerves like a coarse file. He ran down the corridor and snatched the door open hurriedly. He saw Walter Ring kneeling in the middle of the floor, holding Shelley in his arms. Jess knew, at a glance, that she was dead.

He hurried to Walter's side, gripping him tightly by the shoulder. "Put her down," he said sharply. "On the floor."

Walter looked at him, his face ragged. He did as he was told, easing the body ou tof his arms. Jess knelt beside him and parted the bloody hair over the dead girl's temple. His skull had been crushed. And beautiful Shelley Cornelius with all the money would never be able to buy another drink or break the seal on a pack of cigarettes.

He rocked back on his heels, looking around the room. It was undisturbed; nothing overturned, no signs of a struggle. The French doors were closed, the heavy drapes tightly drawn. He looked back at the body. She was wearing bra and slip and panties.

"Where did you find her?" he said.

Walter simply stared at him as though he did not understand. His lips were ashen and there was a stunned, helplessly agonized look in his eyes, as if he had been subjected to physical violence and was still reeling from the shock of it.

"Where?" Jess reiterated sharply.

Walter's eyes focused then. "I'm all right, Jess," he said, his voice forced. "I . . . I'd just forgotten you were the detective. Naturally you have to know."

"Yes," Jess said. "The quicker we get moving, the better our chance will be of catching the murderer."

"She was here," Walter said slowly, gesturing vaguely around the room. "I came in, and found her like this. I thought perhaps she was asleep. I tried to rouse her. Then I saw the blood, lifted her up, and called you."

"You didn't touch anything else?" Jess said swiftly.

"No. There was no time. I saw her and I picked her up. That was all."

"All right." Jess said, turning away. "I must call the house doctor."

He picked up the phone and spoke briefly into it, not giving the reason for his request. He didn't want it to get all over the hotel. Not yet. His every instinct warned him that this was going to be bad —much worse than the jewelry thefts of last year. And he had been brought here to stop it.

He hung up and turned toward the French doors. He parted the drapes and looked at them. They were locked from the inside with a sliding bolt. He remembered standing on the sun deck and looking down.

She had been dead then, behind these doors. He tried to remember whether these particular doors had been open at that time. But from the other side all the balconies looked alike, with waist-high parapets and identical doors. Some had been open, some closed. And

no one had appeared on any of the terraces.

He turned back into the room and went toward the bathroom. He looked inside. It was empty and clean. He went on through to the bedroom, looked around fruitlessly, and tried the connecting door beyond.

"This door's locked," he said to Walter. "Where does it go to?"

Walter was sitting on the couch now. His head was turned, his eyes on the detective. He did not seem to want to look at the body.

"To my room," he said, dully. Then he reddened. "It's always locked. This is a suite, actually. Laura has the bedroom on this side." He pointed toward the connecting door from the living room. "That door also connects, but it stays locked, too. Shelley likes . . . liked her privacy."

Jess went to a closet door and opened it. It was full of Shelley's play-clothes, skirts and shorts and cocktail dresses. There was a big wardrobe trunk shoved back against the wall. A bathrobe was flung over the top of it. He picked it up and looked at it. It was white, made of thick, serviceable terrycloth, and there was blood on one shoulder.

Jess wheeled toward Walter. "What do you suppose—" he said, and stopped.

He knew Walter couldn't take any more. Not now. Not so soon after discovering the body of the woman he was going to marry. But Jess, looking at the robe, knew that the murderer had been inside the suite. He had taken the robe off the body and flung it into the closet. Why, he didn't know. But Shelley had been wearing the robe when she was killed. The spot of blood proved that, for it was on the left shoulder, directly below where the crushing blow had fallen.

He went back into the living room. "Walter," he said gently, "I must know one more thing. Just one. Then I'll leave you alone for a while."

Walter looked up at him, his lips trembling. "What is it, Jess?"

"The door," Jess said. "When you opened it. Was it locked, or did you have a key?"

Walter did not hesitate. "It was open," he said. "I put my hand on the knob—unconsciously, maybe. I was surprised to find it open. Then I thought that possibly Shelley had left it open on purpose, wanting me to awaken her when I came in."

Jess nodded. It had to be that way. The terrace doors were bolted from inside, and the doors into Walter's and Laura's rooms had been locked, too, though there were undoubtedly keys for those. It was the simplest explanation.

There was a knock at the door and Jess went to open it. The doctor, a plump, smiling American, stood there.

"It's bad, doc," Jess said quietly. "Come on in."

The doctor entered, looking about him with sharp eyes behind the thick lenses of his glasses. He saw the body without apparent surprise and knelt quickly beside it, picking up one hand to feel for the pulse.

"Murder," Jess said, his voice still and quiet with the heavy word. "Charley Fink thought he had trouble last year. Now this . . ."

The doctor nodded abstractedly. He turned the body on its side, flexing an arm, peering carefully at the bruised temple.

"How long?" Jess asked.

The doctor shrugged. "Can't tell exactly—it'd take an autopsy to be certain. Half an hour. An hour. Not long."

He glanced at his watch. "Somewhere around two o'clock, I'd say—fifteen minutes either way." He stood up. "We'll have to call the Mexican police authorities."

"Tell Charley first," Jess said. "This is going to be bad." He felt as though he were repeating himself. He was standing near the doors to the terrace now, his eyes on the doctor's face. "How do the Mexican police work? Are they any good?"

The doctor spread his hands. "I've never had any dealings with them," he said. "Cuernavaca is a small town. I only know they didn't solve any of the burglaries last year."

"If they'll let me work on it . . ." Jess said. His voice was strained, edged with impatience. "Call Charley. Tell him the score. Then tell him the police will have to be notified."

He turned and went away from the problem toward the French doors. He slipped the bolt and went outside, taking a deep breath of the fresh air.

There was a lounge chair here, a small glass-topped table, and another chair. He looked over the side, measuring with his eyes the distance to the terrace directly below. Then his gaze traveled horizontally to the terraces on the same level. An agile man could manage it, all right. But he'd need a rope and a grapple. And the doors had been bolted from inside.

He remained there absently staring for a moment, leaning on the waist-high balustrade. Then he inspected the balcony for scratches on the concrete. But there were none. *Maybe this is how the cat-burglar entered,* he thought idly. *It never occurred to me before.*

He turned to go back inside, when a glint of metal arrested his attention. He stooped, and picked up from under the lounge chair a small, round ball of lead. It was dull and extremely heavy and when he closed his fingers around it, it fitted comfortably into his hand.

He heard new, excited voices inside. He dropped the lead ball into the pocket of his shorts and went back in. Charley Fink was there, his hands moving with nervousness and excitement.

"This will shut me down," he was saying. "It'll ruin the season. By tomorrow the hotel will be empty. First burglary . . . now a murder."

"It wasn't a robbery killing," Jess said quietly. "Calm yourself, Charley. Nothing was stolen. I'm quite sure of that. The place wasn't ever ransacked."

"It makes no difference," Charley said. He was a thin, intense man with a large nose and narrow eyes in a lined face. "It will still ruin me. A hotel can't stand this . . . not an exclusive resort like the *De los Reyes*."

"We're going to have to call the police," the doctor said. "And the longer we wait the better chance the murderer will have of getting away Scott free."

Charley Fink was still struggling to control his agitation. "A quick solution," he said, as if speaking to himself. "That's what we need. There's Captain Morales of the Mexican police. A good man. He is my friend. I will call him, and explain." He turned to Jess. "He may want to use you, for your knowledge of the people here, if for no other reason."

"Do that," Jess said, striding toward the door. "Leave everything as is until he arrives. I want to find where some of these other people are."

## II

JESS WENT OUT into the corridor, closing the door firmly behind him. He glanced at it for jimmy marks, not expecting to find them. He was not disappointed. No—the murderer had entered with a key and when he left, in an understandable hurry, he had failed to lock the door behind him.

He walked down the corridor to the next room. He paused, tapped lightly, and waited. After a moment the door opened and Laura stood before him.

Jess tried to smile. "Hello," he said. "I was wondering where you were."

There was a look of inquiry on her face. Jess had been friendly with her, but he had never sought her out.

"Here," she said, gesturing toward the room. She was a lasting kind of girl, with a plain face and a good body. She wore her brown hair pulled back in a pony tail and she went in for colorful Mexican skirts and blouses and straw shoes.

Jess observed her more closely than he ever had before. The bones of her cheeks were high, giving her face a flat, drawn look. She did not have the color of her cousin and beside her she had

seemed drab and almost dull. But, all the time, there was that good, sturdy body. A lot of girl, Laura. She just moved in the wrong league.

Now Jess saw that her eyes were red. "Sleeping?" he said gently. "Or crying?"

She flushed under his gaze. "Crying," she said rebelliously. "If it's any concern of yours."

Jess put on his official manner. "Perhaps I should have told you before," he said. "I'm the house detective here."

Her eyes widened. "Yes?"

"I must talk to you," he said. "He moved toward her and she automatically stood aside, letting him enter as he had known she would.

Inside the room, he stood for an instant staring quietly about him. It was a plain, impersonal hotel room, cut off from the complete suite the way it was.

"What do you want?"

He was startled by the tone of her voice. He turned and looked at her intently. "What were you crying about?" he asked.

"I told you." Her eyes were level and hostile. "It's none of your business."

He kept on watching her. "It *is* my business," he said dispassionately. "Your cousin is dead. Shelley has been murdered."

He was expecting a violent reaction—tears, grief, overwhelming shock. Anything but what he got. She simply put her hand to her mouth, and her eyes widened.

"He did it," she said, whispering the words. "So he did it, after all."

"Who did it?" Jess said sharply. He grasped her arm, holding it more tightly than he realized. "Who killed her?"

But he did not succeed in penetrating the moment of weakness. A film of lying came over her eyes, and he knew that she was swiftly rebuilding her defenses, making good use of the instant it took her to twist her arm out of his clasp.

"Shelley dead?" she said. "Do you really mean it?"

"You know I mean it," Jess said impatiently. "Who killed her? Who were you talking about?"

"I don't know," she said. "I was so startled for a moment that I—"

"You were so startled the truth popped out of you."

But she could not be shaken now. He stood a little back from her, watching her closely. Perhaps she had not been as startled as he had thought. Perhaps the lying had begun with her first words, after all—a calculated impression she was too canny to press upon him.

"I'm going to have to ask you a lot of questions," he said. "We can do it now. Or we can wait for the Mexican police officials. Which shall it be?"

"Go ahead," she said. She

turned away from him and went to a stuffed chair beside the bed. She sat down, placing her arms carefully on the chair arms, her legs crossed at the ankles. He looked down at her straw shoes.

"First and most important," Jess said. "Relatives. They'll have to be notified."

"There are no relatives," Laura said. "Except me. Her mother and father are dead, and she's an only child. The family has played out in the last few years. Shelley and I were alone in the world."

Jess moved to sit on the bed. "So you'll be her heir," he said. He was watching her face.

She shrugged her shoulders. "I couldn't tell you," she said, with a disinterested inflexion. "I've never seen her will. She may have left it all to the Philadelphia Museum of Art, for all I know. Or to Stewart Turner."

"Why to him? Why not to her fiancé?"

She lifted her eyes to his face. "Stewart and Shelley grew up together. They had their first love affair together, and Shelley taught Stewart how to dance." She stopped, looking down at her hands again. "She taught Stewart a lot of things."

"But she was going to marry Walter Ring. What about him?"

She wrinkled her nose. "Ring is the kind of man you like for a while. But he's not the kind you marry."

"Shelley was going to. Within two months, according to what I've heard."

She looked carefully at her hands. "Suppose I told you she'd changed her mind?"

Jess sat very still, taking in the idea. It was a possibility . . . and it opened up a whole new area of speculation.

"Why?" he said at last.

She shrugged her shoulders for the second time. She seemed to be waiting for him to go on. He decided it was time to surprise her by changing the subject.

"What was your relationship to Shelley? I know you're her cousin, but—"

She looked up at him belligerently. There was a surprising bitterness in her hard, flat words. "You know how a very pretty girl likes to have a plain girl as her best friend?"

Jess nodded.

"Well, I'm that best friend. I helped to set Shelley off—to make her look prettier and wittier and more desirable by contrast. That was the sum total of my relationship to Shelley. It sums it all up very succinctly."

"Usually the plain girl doesn't relish a situation like that," Jess observed. "Ordinarily she wouldn't play second fiddle at the expense of her own egoism. Why did you—"

Laura didn't move, but she stopped his words. "Because I like

the moneyed way of living," she said. "Shelley paid all the bills for places like this."

She moved her hand, gesturing. "Sure, I took second pickings with the men and the hotel rooms—everything. But I was here. I was part of it. I wasn't making forty-five dollars a week pounding a typewriter."

Jess leaned forward. "Why don't you go on and tell me the rest of it," he said softly. "You hated Shelley Cornelius—hated her as only one woman can hate another."

She didn't deny it. She sat very still in the chair and her plain, strong-boned face was pale. "Shelley is dead now," she said.

Jess let the silence fill the room and when he ended it the words snapped like pistols firing on a range.

"Where were you at two o'clock?" he demanded.

She looked up at him, startled. "Here. In this room."

He glanced significantly at the connecting door. He got up and went to it, trying the knob. "Do you have a key to this door?"

She shook her head. "What are you implying? That I went into her room and killed her?"

He came back and leaned over her. "You hated Shelley. You are presumably her heir. I can't think of two better motives for murder." He looked at her appraisingly. "And you're a strong girl. You could have done the job easily."

"But I was not here alone," she said carefully.

He leaned back. "Not alone?"

She shook her head. "Stewart Turner was here with me."

He looked at her in disbelief. "Stewart was here . . . and you were crying on his shoulder? Don't expect me to believe that, Laura. You're the kind of woman who cries alone."

He was getting to her now. He saw the apprehension in her eyes and pressed his attack. "You're lying now, Laura. And you're not lying very smart."

She leaned back in her chair, turning her face away from him. "I cried . . . after he left," she said. "He told me he was going to marry Shelley after all. She'd changed her mind about Walter. Stewart's been in love with her for years but she looked on him as . . ." her lips twisted ". . . as a brother. But then her attitude changed."

"Why was he telling *you* these things? And why did it make you cry?"

She lowered her face so he couldn't see into her eyes. Her voice was almost inaudible. "I love Stewart," she said. "I've loved him as long as he's loved Shelley. And lately—since Shelley fell in with Walter Ring—he's been turning to me."

Jess stood up. He went to her and put a firm hand under her chin.

He lifted her head. She tried to twist out of his grip but he held her firmly.

"So he left," he said grimly. "Then you went into Shelley's room and picked up something and killed her. That's the truth, isn't it?"

She stopped moving. This girl had nerve, resourcefulness. He had thought it before, but he knew it now. "Stewart left," she said. "Then I lay down on my bed and cried. I was still there when you came. No girl likes to lose her man . . . not to a woman as cold and calculating as Shelley was, not to a woman who's had everything her own way, always."

She began to tremble, and he released her.

"You killed her," he said matter-of-factly. "I know it. And I'm going to prove it, Laura."

He paused, turning away from her almost carelessly. "When I told you she had been murdered you accused Stewart to save yourself. There was no one else you could have been talking about." He paused again, turning back toward her. "It was a nice bit of acting, Laura. Just a damaging hint, followed by a refusal to say more, confirming my suspicions. You knew that if you could persuade me to believe you, you'd have your revenge on both of them."

"No," she said hoarsely. "No." She put her hands over her face. "I'm afraid he did kill her. And it was my fault. It was my doing."

"Why? He was in love with her. She had come back to him at last." He shook her shoulder. "What are you keeping from me?"

"I told him he was taking second-best. I told him I'd heard Walter Ring in there with her at night for weeks and weeks. I was beside myself with rage and resentment. I wanted to hurt him."

"And when he left?"

"He was angry enough to kill—because he believed me. He'd suspected them from the first and what I told him must have driven him half out of his mind."

"So he walked out," Jess said. "Did he go into her room?"

Laura shook her head numbly. "I don't know. I wasn't listening."

"I know," he said harshly. "You were crying."

He'd had about as much of this as he could stand. He had to get a breath of fresh air, a drink. The Mexican police would be arriving soon and he'd have to deal with them. He had taken all that he could listen to, the mixed lies and the mixed truth, the naked emotions.

"Can you hear through these walls?" he said.

She shook her head.

He was already walking toward the door. "Did you hear anything at all from Shelley's room while you were in here? Voices, a cry—anything?"

She shook her head. "No," she said. "Not a sound."

He opened the door. "Stay put," he said. "And don't tell any of the other guests about the murder. You'll have to talk to the Cuernavaca police. I'll be back."

He paused, his hand on the knob. "According to your story, one of two people killed Shelley, Laura. You, or Stewart. Which do you want it to be?"

He watched her. She put her hands up to her face, then crumpled her head to rest on her arm, hiding from him. He closed the door softly behind him as he went out.

He had his answer.

## III

JESS WENT BY his room to change clothes. He took off the trunks and tossed them on the floor by his bed. They fell heavily and he remembered the ball of lead he had found on the balcony terrace. He fished it out and looked at it again, shaking his head. He tossed it a couple of times, thinking about Laura Cornelius. She was an interesting girl, with the courage to face up to her own emotional instability and shortcomings, and more to recommend her than she herself believed. But she was also doing a lot of very skillful lying. Jess was sure of that.

He put the ball on his dresser and quickly changed into slacks and sports shirt. The police would be here by now and he had to talk to this Captain Morales.

He went to the downstairs bar. As soon as he entered he saw Stewart Turner sitting at the end of the bar, a drink before him. He moved down toward him, asking Pedro for a tequila cocktail on the way.

He had always liked Stewart Turner. He was a big blond, handsome man whom everybody liked instinctively. He had money too, Jess knew—not as much as Shelley but enough to live comfortably on.

But he couldn't afford to like any of these people right now—not even Laura. They were all mixed up together in a murder and Jess knew for a certainty that the answer to the riddle lay somewhere in the emotional strands he hadn't even begun to untangle.

"Hello," he said cordially. He sat down with the greeting and leaned to get his tequila cocktail.

Stewart still had not moved, had not answered him. He was trying to ignore Jess. Jess took a sip of his drink and looked at Stewart again. The big man was drunk, Jess saw, and he didn't want to talk to him in that condition. But he had to.

"Stewart," he said, jogging his arm.

Stewart raised his head blearily and looked at him. "Oh, hello,

Jess. How about a tequila?"

"I've got one," Jess said. "You're hitting it heavy and early today, aren't you?"

"Jesse James," Stuart said. "That's some name for a house detective. I didn't know it was part of your job to keep count of my drinks, Jesse James."

"It's not," Jess said sharply. "Something's happened upstairs you ought to know about, Stewart. Something bad."

He was watching Stewart's face, but it didn't change. "Sure," he said. "You're not telling me anything. Something bad's been happening upstairs for longer than you know, Jesse James."

"I'm talking about Shelley Cornelius," Jess said patiently. "She's dead, Stewart. Murdered."

"Sure," Stewart said. "I'm talking about Shelley Cor . . ." He stopped with a quick intake of his breath and when he turned his head to look at Jess he was no longer drunk. His eyes were sick, and cold sober. "Dead?" he said. "Murdered?"

Somebody, Jess thought wearily, *somebody* in this crew is a good actor.

"Yes," he said. "Where have you been this afternoon?"

Stewart's eyes shifted. He was a long time answering. "Here in the bar mostly. Sleeping before that."

"Everyone seems to have borrowed my siesta habit," Jess said lightly. "Have you seen Laura?"

Stewart frowned. He reached one hand for his drink and gulped the rest of it. The hand was trembling. "Not since this morning," he said. "Why? You don't think she—"

"Just wondering," Jess said. "Do you?" He waited for an answer, but didn't get one. He went on. "What about Walter Ring?"

"Last I saw of him, he and Shelley were going swimming. This morning, just before breakfast." Stewart paused, frowning. "Listen, you're asking a lot of questions. But I've got some, too. How did all this happen? Who . . ."

"That's what we're trying to find out," Jess said patiently. "That's why I'm asking questions. Tell me, Stewart—how was it with you and Shelley? How did you feel about her?"

Stewart looked at him narrowly. "I've known Shelley all my life," he said slowly. "We grew up together. She was tops in my book." He grinned, a trifle embarrassedly. "We once had a torrid two-week romance when we were seventeen. Since then . . ." he shrugged his shoulders. "Good friends, I guess you'd call it. You know how you are when you're seventeen."

"Yes," Jess said. "What about Laura?"

There was a longer hesitation this time. "She's a fine girl," Stewart said then, a shade too heartily.

"I like Laura. We've always gotten along—even though she's always been a bit envious of Shelley. She comes from the poor side of the family, you know. Her father . . ."

"Yes," Jess said impatiently. "I know all about that." He was tired of listening to lies. "Don't talk to the other guests—we're trying to keep this quiet for a while. I'd suggest you go to your own room and wait. The police will want to talk to you."

He got down off the stool, putting money on the bar for his drink. "Tell me, Stewart. Who was paying . . ." he moved his hand, ". . . here in the hotel?"

Stewart laughed. "For Laura and Walter Ring and herself, Shelley was paying. Who else?"

"What about yourself?"

Stewart stopped laughing. "I never let Shelley spend her money on me," he said tightly.

Jess left him sitting there. He went out of the bar through the still-quiet lobby—the news had not gotten around yet, apparently—and took the elevator upstairs. The room, when he arrived, was crowded with Charley Fink, the doctor, two men in Mexican police uniforms with prominent gun holsters, and a Mexican in civilian clothes who was the police doctor. He looked for the body, but it was gone.

"Here he is now," Charley said. "Where have you been, Jess?"

"Talking to people," Jess said. "Where's the body?"

"Taken away," Charley said. "Down the service elevator. No use alarming the guests. Jess, this is *Capitán* Morales. Jesse James, my house man."

"Glad to meet you," Captain Morales said. He spoke colloquial American with a distinct British accent. He was a slight, lithe man, his cocoa-brown face filled with a quick, ready smile. "*Señor* Fink tells me you are a policeman."

"When I'm working at it," Jess said, shaking hands. "It's a pleasure to meet you, Captain. Though the circumstances . . ."

"Jesse James," the captain said, laughing. "That is the name of one of your famous *bandidos,* is it not? An odd name, that, for a policeman."

"Yes," Jess said, trying to smile. He had heard that all-too-obvious joke a good many times in the last few years. He decided abruptly that he wasn't going to like the friendly captain.

"What have you found out, Jess?" Charley said quickly. "Getting close to it?"

"Let's sit down," Jess said. "Might as well do this comfortably. Did you find anything new with the police examination?"

"No," Morales said. "I did not really expect anything, to pick up the solution from the floor."

Jess nodded his head, looking around. "By the way, where is

Walter Ring? He found the body."

"I sent him to his room," the doctor interposed. "He was suffering from shock." He added with a slight shrug, "I thought it would be best."

Jess nodded. "Well, the way I see it, Captain," he said, "Shelley was rather exclusive. She did all of her vacationing with the friends she brought with her. I doubt if she's spoken to more than half a dozen of the other people staying here. So I think the answer is to be found among those three—Laura Cornelius, Walter Ring, and Stewart Turner."

He stopped, looking around at the listening faces. "I've talked to all three of them. There's a lot of lying going on—how much of it is connected with the murder I can't tell yet."

He focused his attention on Captain Morales. "I already know these people, Captain. That's why I think I can help you—if you'll permit my cooperation."

"Of course," Captain Morales said. "I will gladly avail myself of your knowledge and experience, Lieutenant." He leaned forward in his chair. "But have you considered the possibility that this unfortunate occurrence may be associated with the cat-burglaries of last year?"

Jess nodded. "Yes," he said. "I thought of that. Shelley was probably the wealthiest client of the hotel this season, Captain. But I've never seen her with any particularly expensive display of jewelry . . . jade mostly, silver, mosaic pieces like the *vendedores* sell on the streets outside. Nothing really valuable . . ."

"The thief would not know that?" Captain Morales suggested smoothly. "I have a theory, Mr. James. You are a cat burglar. Naturally you try for the wealthiest rooms, where the jewel-boxes contain more than tinsel. You enter during the quiet period of the afternoon because," he smiled slightly, "it is known that the American policeman Jesse James does not sleep at night. You disturb the room's occupant . . . you kill her. But you are not a killer. You are a plain and honest thief. So you leave hurriedly, panicked by the knowledge of what you have done." He spread his hands. "And there you have it."

"What about these friends of Shelley's?" Jess said stubbornly. "I've been told different and conflicting stories about the same events."

Captain Morales shrugged. "People will lie," he murmured. "Regardless of the circumstance. You always uncover some private business in a murder investigation that someone wants covered up. Almost everybody has something to hide—murder or not."

"You're right there," Jess conceded. "However, I can't believe that an outside thief did this job.

We've never even discovered how the cat burglar raided the rooms in the first place."

Captain Morales stood up. "I have that worked out," he said grandly. "Come. I will show you."

He led the way outside and into the elevator. They went down, through the lobby, and out the other side to the parking lot where the Captain had left his car. They followed him silently, Jess watching his slender, brown-uniformed back. He found the Captain a very odd one.

"I came prepared to demonstrate," the Captain said.

His sergeant opened the trunk of the car, taking out a length of rope with grappling hooks, covered with sound-deadening rubber, fastened to one end. Captain Morales led the way back to the patio and paused, looking up at the first balcony terrace. He stepped back and prepared to throw the grapples. On the second try, he succeeded in snagging the balcony.

With a lithe, snake-like movement, he lifted himself and began climbing the rope. In a few minutes he disappeared over the edge of the balcony. Then he hauled up the rope and flung it at the next terrace. It caught on the first try and he went on up, climbing with speed and dash, turning to grin down at them. It was a very silent operation.

He had to try three times on the next level before he got the grapples securely set. They all stood in a circle beneath, watching him. Jess remembered having had the same thought on Shelley's terrace after he had discovered the body.

The Captain reached up a hand and pulled himself over the balustrade. There was a muffled scream from the room beyond.

"I beg your pardon, *señorita,* Captain Morales said hastily. "This is the police. We are only attempting an experiment."

He quickly slid down the rope, stage by stage, and gained the ground again. "*Señor* Fink," he said gravely. "You made a mistake with the *balcones.* You see how easy it is."

Captain Morales turned to him. "That is easy," he said. "After the murder, the thief bolts the terrace door to hide his way of entrance. Then he calmly goes out into the corridor, down the stairs —or maybe he even takes the elevator—and goes out of the hotel unobserved."

"But you postulated a panic-stricken man who has been interrupted," Jess said quietly. 'A panic-stricken man will not pause to conceal the bridges behind him. He runs—without thinking about covering up his tracks."

He stopped, watching Captain Morales closely. "But we can try both methods. You work on your thief—you have the facilities for that. I will continue with my

theory about the friends and lovers of the victim. All right?"

"It is a bargain," the captain said, laughing. "But take my word for it, old boy. When I catch my thief, I'll have your murderer, too."

"I hope so," Jess said, thinking of Laura and Stewart and Walter Ring, of the crumpled, lovely body that he and Walter Ring had found together. "From the evidence you've shown us this afternoon, Captain," he added, laughing. "That cat-burglar could be you!"

The Captain laughed too. But his eyes were cool and appraising on Jess. "Yes," he said. "It could be, couldn't it? From the evidence shown this afternoon."

## IV

JESS KNOCKED ON the door of Walter Ring's room. It was opened almost immediately and Walter Ring stood before him. He was wearing peasant slacks now, with a white *guayavera* shirt accenting the tanned darkness of his flesh. He looked better than he had when Jess had last seen him.

"I've got to talk to you, Walter," Jess said gently.

"I've just finished answering all the questions of the police," Walter said.

"Maybe I have some different ones." Jess gave him a friendly smile. "Captain Morales and I have two quite different theories."

Walter looked resigned. "Come on in then. I haven't got too much time, but—"

He stood aside and Jess entered the room, looking about him with quick eyes. It was identical with Laura's room on the other side of the suite but it was more crowded with Walter's personality than hers had been with Laura's. Trophy cups were set out on the dresser and on top of the bookcase and there was athletic equipment in every corner—a bag of golf clubs, a tennis racket hanging on the wall, a jai-alai *cesta* hanging beside it. On the floor of the open closet Jess saw a small punching bag with its spring rig.

He looked at the open suitcase on the bed finding it odd that Walter Ring would possess such battered luggage. "Packing?" he said in surprise.

Walter Ring had gone back to folding shirts into the suitcase. "Yes," he said. "I must leave." His mouth was a twisted smile. "I can't afford this kind of living on my own resources."

"Don't leave until you're given the word," Jess said gravely. "You're a prime suspect, you know."

Walter Ring jerked around, his face paling. "Me?" he said explosively. "Why, I . . . why do you suspect me?"

"No particular reason," Jess said. "Everybody that knew Shel-

ley is suspect. That's why it's going to be necessary to ask a great many personal questions. I hope you'll cooperate."

Walter turned back to his packing. "If it'll help find Shelley's murderer," he said slowly, "I'll answer anything. Fire away."

Jess sat down in a chair, moving a pair of slacks to make room. "I don't quite understand your relationship with Shelley, Walter," he said. He kept his voice easy and friendly.

"What do you mean?"

"Well," Jess said bluntly. "You seem to have been living off her."

Walter turned around then and sat down on the bed. "It looks that way to you, does it?" he said evenly.

"Stewart told me she was paying your bills here."

Walter's face darkened. "Haven't you ever heard of the host-guest relationship? This whole trip was Shelley's idea. As far as I know, she's paying Stewart Turner's bills, too."

"He says not." Jess waited for a moment. "How and where did you meet Shelley, Walt?"

Walt's face softened. "In Miami . . . about six months ago. I was there at a friend's house for a private jai-alai tournament. She had never seen jai-alai before, so she came down for the week. We met—and we fell in love. It was that simple, Jess."

"Almost," Jess murmured. "I understand your reputation with women is as good as your athletic record, Walt. That makes it less simple. And you have no money, while Shelley . . ."

"Sure," Walter said. "I've played around. I like rich women, always have. But this was different. This was love. I believe a man has a right to change his outlook on life."

Jess looked at him narrowly. "Tell me the truth, Walter. I want it plain and unvarnished. Did you love Shelley—or were you marrying her for her money?"

Walter's face flushed. He looked away from Jess, getting up and turning to his packing again, his hands too busy among the clothing.

"Jess," he said. His voice was low, so low that Jess could barely hear him. "I loved Shelley. I'd have married her if she hadn't had a dime."

Jess knew honest emotion when he saw it. "I believe, you, Walt," he said soberly. "I believe you."

Walter turned toward him. "You didn't know her very well. But she was a woman, Jess. She was smart and educated and intelligent. And she was beautiful. She was warm in a way that only a smart, intelligent, beautiful woman knows how to be." His face quivered for a moment. "There'll never be another Shelley Cornelius. And when I think that she was almost mine . . ."

Jess let it die there, sitting quietly in his chair. Then he broke the silence, changing the subject.

"How do you make a living, Walter? I've never quite figured that out, either."

Walter sat down again, facing Jess. "You've always held a steady job, Jesse," he said. His voice was quiet again, as still as his neat, compact, muscular body. "So you may find it hard to understand. I'm a . . . sportsman dilettante. I'm good at just about anything. Sometimes I organize amateur tennis or jai-alai tournaments. Sometimes I give private lessons in golf or riding."

He looked around at the room. "There's scarcely a sport at which I'm not more than competent." He was not bragging; his voice was a flat statement of fact. "I swim and dive well, I'm a good boxer in my weight, I have a nice handicap in polo. People with money like to have a man like me around—to compete, to instruct, or just to watch. And I've learned the social graces that go with it."

He stopped, watching Jess again. "It's hard for you to understand, I know. I pick up something here and something there. Maybe a nice gift that's pawnable for several hundred dollars; maybe it's an agreed salary. Sometimes it's just board and room and entertainment. But in a year I do all right, take it all in all."

Walter looked straight at Jess. "So I'm what I am. And it was all right. I kept telling myself that one of these days I'd marry one of the rich women I played with, and could look upon the match as my Master's Tournament winning. But then Shelley came along and we . . ." he stopped. After a moment he went on again. "I'm not sorry it happened, even now. But you can say, if you wish, that my luck didn't hold."

"Shelley's luck was pretty bad, too," Jess said.

Walter jerked upright. "You're implying I'm thinking only of myself." he said harshly. "You don't know what I'm going through, Jess. I keep seeing her lying dead, keep remembering that she was killed while I lay sleeping up there on that sundeck."

"I'm sorry," Jess said sincerely. "I shouldn't have said that." He stood up. "I'm going up on the sundeck again. Want to come along?"

Walter stood up gratefully. "Yes," he said. "Anything to get out of here." He looked distastefully around the crowded room.

"What will you do now?" Jess asked curiously. "After this is all over?"

Walter shrugged his shoulders. "Back to the amateur circuit," he said. "I have a standing invitation to teach Count Bernal how to play golf. He's at his place in Florida now."

They went to the roof elevator and took it up to the sun deck. Jess looked around. "Do you remember what time I met you up here?" he said.

"Sometime around two o'clock, I think," Walter said thoughtfully.

Jess looked at him. Unless he was very mistaken, Jess was hearing another lie. It had been two-twenty exactly when he had paused to look down into the patio, before Walter had joined him in the blazing sunlight.

They stopped and looked sombrely down over the side at the terraces below. Some of them were populated with sunbathers, drinkers, card-players. The sun had lowered, now, and the heat was not so intense.

"Did you notice whether Shelley's terrace doors were open or closed while you were up here?" Jess asked. "The Captain has a theory . . ."

Walter shook his head. "I don't believe I even looked," he said regretfully. "I came up for a sunbath and went to sleep. Then I started down because I knew it was late and I'd promised to take Shelley for a drink."

They walked out on the sun deck. People were here, too, sprawled out on pads, their skins bared to the blazing sun overhead. It made Jess feel warm to watch them. He paused once and looked down again. Now he could pick out Shelley's window distinctly and he saw that someone had opened the terrace doors. He stiffened and shaded his eyes. Laura was down there, moving about where the murder had taken place so short a time before.

He beckoned Walter. "Look," he said softly.

Walter came to his side. "Laura," he breathed.

"Yes," Jess said. "And I know that Captain Morales locked and sealed the corridor door. So she must have a key to the connecting door from her room. She lied about that, too."

Laura came slowly toward the terrace, her eyes on the carpet. She was so close that Jess could plainly see the expression on her face. It was tense, bemused, and suddenly she knelt to scrutinize a spot on the rug just inside the doors.

She stood up, putting her hands on her face and drawing them down slowly and heavily. Her shoulders slumped and she stood motionless for a moment. Then she lifted her eyes to the terrace. Beyond, through the glare of the sun, she must have seen Jess watching her. She whirled, in a sudden frenzy of haste, and hurried out of sight.

"Now I wonder what that was all about?" Jess said, almost to himself. He stood in deep thought for a moment and then shook himself.

He moved a step backwards,

nudging Walter's arm. "We never did get that *cerveza,* Walter," he said. "Let's go down and have one now."

"That's a good idea."

They were turning to go when a corner of the sun deck caught Jess' eye. Several chairs were folded against the parapet and beside it lay a long, woven, basket-shaped object.

"What's that?" Jess said, stooping to pick it up.

"Why, I've been looking for that," Walter exclaimed. I couldn't remember where I'd left it!"

Jess saw now that it was a jai-alai *cesta* or basket. It strapped to the wrist and extended far beyond the fingers in a gentle, shallow curve. It was a kind of glove, used to catch and throw the *pelota.* There had been another like it hanging on the wall in Walter's room.

Walter took it from him. "In all the excitement I'd forgotten where it was," he explained. "I was planning to play this afternoon, so I brought it along with me. I must have left it lying here and someone pitched it over out of the way."

"Let's go get that beer," Jess said. They walked toward the elevator. "They tell me jai-alai is quite a game."

"You've never seen it?" Walter sounded happy and enthusiastic for the first time today. "You should go to the *frontón* in Mexico City some time. It's the fastest game in the world—and it can be dangerous, too, if you get in the way of the *pelota.* It's just about my favorite game."

"Where do you play here in Cuernavaca?"

"Some of the people who have houses here have built private courts. I've gotten acquainted with them." He laughed. "They find it unusual for an American to play—it's mostly a Latin-American game. It came from the Basque, originally. I learned it in Miami. I'm good at it, because I'm small and fast on my feet. That's what it takes."

They took the elevator and went down to the lobby. They walked through to the patio and Jess paused at the door. Looking outside, he saw Laura and Stewart Turner sitting at a table, leaning toward each other. Laura was talking, Stewart listening attentively.

Walter Ring halted. "I'm afraid I'll have to pass up buying you a drink," he said tautly. "Laura and Stewart are here. I don't want to see them, knowing one of them may have . . ." He stopped, looking at Jess. "Tell me—do you share my belief that either Laura or Stewart are the likeliest suspects?"

Jess shook his head. He said cautiously, "I don't know who did it. Not yet. But I'm getting closer all the time."

Walter turned away. "I'll see you later, then. Maybe we can still get a drink together."

Jess let him get a few steps away. Then he said, "Walter."

Walter turned and looked back at him, coming a step or two nearer. "Yes?"

"Walter, when did Shelley tell you that she wasn't going to marry you after all?"

Walter's lips tightened and most of the color ebbed from his face. He walked swiftly toward Jess, stopping close against him, staring into his face.

"Who told you that?"

Jess tensed himself against the little man's fury. "Laura Cornelius," he said. "She told me Shelley had decided to leave you and marry Stewart Turner instead."

Walter took a deep breath like a boxer, grabbing Jess's shirt with his hand. "She's lying," he said. "Shelley would never have left me. I loved Shelley. I tell you, she's lying."

"It would give you a perfect motive for murder," Jess said bluntly.

Walter turned blindly from him, staring into the patio. "So she's the one," he said. "Only the murderer would tell a lie like that." He turned back to Jess. "She did it. I'm absolutely convinced of it now."

"Suppose you tell me why."

"Shelley loved me, Jess. I'm not her kind of person, but she loved me and she was going to marry me. She would never have dreamed of leaving me."

"All right," Jess said. "I believe that part of it, at least."

Walter looked at Laura again. She was still leaning across the table, whispering to Stewart.

"You'd better pin it on her, Jess," he said bitterly. "And do it soon. Do you hear? Soon. Before I . . ."

He stopped abruptly, and turned away. When he disappeared into the lobby, he seemed to be almost running.

## V

JESS STARED AFTER Walter Ring thoughtfully. Then he went on into the patio. Stewart saw him coming and signaled Laura Cornelius. Laura leaned back and looked up at him.

"Won't you join us?" she said. "I know you're going to anyway."

Jess grunted and sat down. *"Dos Equis,"* he said to the waiter who came to take his order. He looked at Laura and Stewart. "Have you two got your stories straight between you now?"

Laura flushed. "What do you mean?"

"I mean just what I said. You told me one thing, Laura. And Stewart, in effect, denied it categorically. He said he was never in your room today, that Shelley had not decided to marry him in-

stead of Walter Ring."

Laura picked up her glass and drank from it. "I lied to you, Mr. James," she said. "Every word I told you was a lie. About Stewart and me, I mean."

"Why?" Jess said.

Laura bridled. "That's your favorite question, isn't it, Mr. James?"

She looked straight into his face. Her eyes were candid and open. "I don't know," she said. "There was no reason for it, I suppose. Just nerves . . . hysteria. I was afraid to admit being alone in the room next to where Shelley was murdered."

Jess turned to Stewart. "Then your story was right all the time. You weren't in Laura's room. She didn't tell you Shelley had been . . . entertaining Walter in her room." He was watching the other closely. "And you didn't leave in a tearing anger. To be short about it, none of it happened."

"That's right," Stewart said. "Laura shouldn't have lied to you, Jess. I told her to get it straight with you right away, before you jumped to the wrong conclusions."

"Fine," Jess said. "Just fine." He leaned back in his chair, staring stonily across the patio. "When are you two going to get married now?"

"As soon as . . ." Laura began, and stopped.

Jess brought his chair down with a thump. "I thought so," he said grimly. "You're back on each other's side again. And you don't care if Shelley's murderer is ever found—so long as you can continue on your merry, callous way."

He put a hand down on the glass table top, hard. "Listen. Somebody is going to hang for Shelley Cornelius's murder. At this stage, I don't much care who."

He glared at them. "Do you understand me? I've got a case against either one of you that Captain Morales will listen to. I don't know and I don't care what Mexican justice is like. But I can go on the witness stand and tear down every story you two have told me."

There was a long silence. Stewart moistened his lips. His face was nervous, uncertain.

"This is the way it was," he said. "Yesterday Shelley and I were in the swimming pool. We were alone there. She swam over to me and she said, 'Stewart, do you still love me?' "

He glanced at Laura. She was sitting still as a stone, her face pale in the dmming light. Stewart bit his lip and looked away. "Laura and I . . . well, we'd gotten to know each other. But Shelley . . . ever since I was a kid, I'd thought I'd marry Shelley some day. But she wouldn't have me. I was too close to her, and ordinary. When she said that, it came on me too suddenly. I told her, 'I've always wanted to marry

you, Shelley. I've always loved you. You know that.' "

He looked at his drink as though he wanted to taste it but didn't dare. "To tell you the honest truth, I didn't think she really meant it. I thought it was one of the little games Shelley played sometimes. But she said, 'Let's get married, Stew. Right away now.'

"Her voice told me she wasn't kidding. 'What about Walter?' I said. 'I don't love Walter, I love you,' she told me. 'I'll tell Walter I've changed my mind and then we'll get married. You're the one I've wanted to marry, Stew. Always.' "

Stewart looked at Laura again, painfully. "I'm sorry, Laura. But we've got to tell the truth now. I couldn't turn it down . . . not after all the years I'd waited." He stopped, his voice rising. "It wouldn't have worked, Laura. I know that now. I'd have come back to you. But I . . ."

"So now Laura's story is the truth again," Jess said skeptically. "Why did you deny it when I talked to you before."

Stewart did not look at Laura. "Because I . . . was afraid."

"You were afraid Laura had killed Shelley," Jess said. "So you were covering up for her. Or you wanted me to think you were." He sighed. "If I knew which of your stories to believe, I'd probably have the murderer."

He glared at them. "I don't know whether you realize it or not. But every lie you've told me gives the murderer that much better chance to get away."

"Laura's story is true," Stewart said stubbornly. "Even with all the gaps in it. When I left her room I was very angry. I wanted to kill Shelley then. I'll admit it. But I went down to the bar and drank it out instead. I was jealous of Shelley and I knew, deep down, that I really loved Laura. That's enough to make any man drink."

Jess looked at Laura.

"Yes," she said. "And I was lying on the bed crying." She met Jess' eyes unflinchingly. "I could have killed Shelley in that moment, too, Jess. Cheerfully. I think if she'd walked into my room, I would have. But I—"

"But you didn't," Jess interposed. "Even though you had a key to the door between your rooms."

She flushed again, her first outward manifestation of emotion since Stewart's story. "All right," she said. "I lied about it. I was frightened, Jess. I was scared of you."

"Why did you go in there after the room was sealed by the police?" Jess asked. He saw Stewart's start of surprise, but pretended his thoughts were elsewhere.

Laura's lips tightened. "I wanted to see the room. I knew Shel-

ley better than you did, Jess, and I thought I'd know if anything was wrong or out of place. And there was."

"Yes?"

Laura leaned forward. "She wasn't killed where she was lying. She was killed near the terrace windows . . . there's a very dim spot of blood there. And I thought it odd that she was wearing only slip and bra, because Shelley didn't dress that way. And I was right."

She looked at Jess meaningfully. "Whoever killed her moved her body to the middle of the room—and they took off the terrycloth bathrobe she was wearing and put it in the closet."

"Yes?" Jess said, unmoved. "And what does all that add up to?"

Laura seemed taken aback. "I don't know," she admitted. "But it must mean something."

"You'd better concentrate on telling me the truth," Jess said. "And let me and Captain Morales do the detecting."

But he was impressed despite himself. He had missed the minute bloodstain completely. He'd have to check on that. He leaned back again, staring hard at them. "So you're going to get married now, after all."

Laura glanced at Stewart, and his hand went out and tightened over hers. "Yes," he said. "We are."

Jess sighed. "All right. But don't forget that you were both angry enough to kill her at two o'clock this afternoon. And at two o'clock Shelley died."

"What about Walter Ring?" Stewart said angrily.

"Did he know that Shelley was going to leave him?"

Stewart subsided. "I don't know," he said. "Shelley promised me she'd tell him. If he did know—"

"Yes," Jess said. "If he did know it gives him a motive." He remembered Walter's departure a few minutes ago. He looked at Laura. "I want you to be careful. You hear me? Be sure to lock your door tonight and don't open it except to Stewart. Or to me."

"Why?" she whispered. "Do you think I'm in danger?"

"Yes," Jess said, soberly. "We may all be in danger. And you'd better be careful too, Stewart."

A bellboy came to the table with a telegram for Laura.

She looked up, startled, and took it from the tray. Stewart put money on the tray for her while she opened it.

"Oh," she said. "It's from Philadelphia—from the family." She read the message silently, then turned to Jess. "We're telling you the truth now, Jess. I am Shelley's sole heir. She's left everything to me."

Jess regarded her steadily for a moment. "Are you happy?"

She stared at the telegram. "I ought to be," she said, her voice troubled. "So many years I've envied her, wanted to be her. Not just *like* her, but Shelley—Shelley herself. And now . . ." She lifted her head. "No," she said. "I'm grateful. I should have been grateful while she was alive. But I can't be happy about it. Not yet. Not now."

Jess finished his beer and stood up. "Stick together, you two," he said. "I'll be wanting to talk to you later."

## VI

JESS WANTED to go to his room but he went back to the sixth floor instead. He glanced at the Mexican Police seal on the door of Shelley's room. He went past it to Laura's door and used his passkey to enter. Moving quietly, he searched the room very quickly and thoroughly.

Then he crossed to the connecting door. His passkey worked and he swung up the door silently, following through. Abruptly he stopped. Charley Fink was in the room.

Fink was alone, sitting quietly in an armchair, staring thoughtfully at the place on the floor where the body had lain. Jess was startled by the expression on his face. It held a sadness he had never seen on Charley's countenance before, a deep, folded, tired sadness in its angular contours.

Fink did not see Jess standing in the doorway. He continued his silent brooding for a moment, then stood up and moved toward the dresser. He flipped open a jewelry box and idly turned the pieces with his finger. He picked up a dangling mosaic ear-ring and looked at it. Then he replaced it carefully and closed the box again.

As the lid snapped shut his shoulders sagged, and he gave a sigh that sounded almost like a sob. He turned reluctantly and started toward the door where Jess stood.

Jess stepped through. "Charley Fink, the jolly hotelkeeper," he said heartily. "What are you doing here?"

Charley jumped at the sight of him. "Just . . . looking around," he said.

Jess walked on into the room. "There's a lot of traffic in here," he said lightly. "For a locked room, that is. Laura Cornelius was casing it earlier. Are you helping me detect too, Charley?"

"No," Charley said uncertainly. "I . . . well, this was my best suite, Jess. Guess I was just sitting here reminding myself that my beautiful new hotel is finished."

"What makes you say that?"

Charley turned away without replying, staring out the terrace doors. A beautiful sunset was going on back there in the mountains

but Jess was sure the hotel keeper didn't see it.

"I've always wanted to own my own hotel," Charley said. "But when the big break comes it's followed by jewelry thefts, and murder."

He stopped, staring miserably at Jess, his face furrowed. "I'll tell you something, Jess. Did you know that Shelley was here last year? While the thefts were going on. For a while I suspected her."

He laughed. "It's the honest-to-God truth, Jess. She was too good to be true. Beautiful, rich,—an adornment to any resort hotel that's just getting stared. She almost had to be a phony."

Jess watched him. "I can't see Shelley as a cat-burglar," he said.

Charley shrugged his shoulders. "Maybe not," he said. "But there are other ways. She was a lot friendlier with the guests last year, Jess. Of course, she was alone." He looked around the room thoughtfully. "I've seen stranger things. Sure, she was rich. But a girl with fifty million could still be a kleptomaniac."

"Come on," Jess said. "Let's go up to my room. I want to talk to you, anyway."

He turned to go, then he remembered. He went to the place near the terrace doors where Laura had knelt and got down on his hands and knees. He parted the rug fibers gently with his hands. Laura had been right. There was a dime-sized splash of blood there, brown and crusted over now. He stood up, wondering how Laura had known where to look, and measured with his eye the distance to the spot where the body had lain. The splash of blood was too far away to have come from there.

He stood up. "Come on," he said. He led the way back through Laura's room and into the corridor again. They ascended in the elevator to Jess' floor and went down the corridor to the detective's own room.

"Where's Stewart Turner's room?" Jess asked as he inserted his key in the lock. "I've been meaning to ask you."

"On the same floor as the others," Charley said. "It's down at the corner, a room just like this, but at the other end of the corridor."

They entered Jess' room, and sat down. "Do you think you're getting close?" Charley asked.

Jess frowned. "I keep having the feeling that all I need is one more piece of the puzzle. Just one more piece. Then it will all fit together."

Charley leaned forward. "The guests will be suspecting the truth soon and start moving out." His face was drawn tight. "Unless we turn up a murderer by morning I might as well close for the rest of the season."

"I'm doing my best, Charley,"

Jess said sympathetically. "I know how important it is to you."

"What progress have you made so far?"

Jess sat still for a moment, going over it in his mind. "It runs like this," he said. "Shelley was murdered around two o'clock—give or take fifteen minutes. She was alone in her room, undressed, wearing a terrycloth bathrobe. The murderer entered either through the corridor door or by climbing the terraces and coming through the terrace doors. Maybe he meant to kill her. Maybe he only meant to steal her valuables, if we are to believe Captain Morales." He paused, thoughtfully. "Captain Morales was very good on that rope, wasn't he?"

"Yes, but I don't see—"

"Never mind, skip it. To get back to the way it may have been. The intruder kills her, with a blunt instrument in the old phrase, that he must have taken away with him. He killed her standing just in front of the terrace doors. If they were open, it was a break for him that somebody wasn't standing on the sun deck watching him. Maybe he closed the doors as he entered."

He paused, tenting his fingers and looking at them intently. "Then, for a reason I haven't figured out yet, he dragged the body to the middle of the room. He removed the terrycloth bathrobe with the blood on it and flung it into the closet. Again—reason unknown. He bolted the terrace doors—if they weren't closed all the time—and went out into the corridor, leaving that door unlocked.

"That's the general outlines, with all the alternate possibilities. If I'm to believe what I've been told, while the murder was taking place, Walter Ring was lying asleep on the sun deck, and Laura Cornelius and Stewart Turner were quarreling in Laura's room. It seems that Stewart was breaking off with Laura and marrying Shelley." He paused and shot a glance at his employer. "And where were you, Charley?"

Charley looked startled. He sat bolt upright in the chair. "Me? Why—in my office, I suppose. I don't know for sure. In fact—" He stopped, staring at Jess in amazement. "Don't tell me you suspect me, too."

"Just wondering," Jess said cautiously. "Just wondering, that's all."

Charley subsided. "My God," he said. "My God."

Jess went calmly on. "Stewart stamps angrily out of Laura's room. He could have gone next door and killed Shelley in a fit of rage, then gone on down to the bar and got himself stinking drunk. Laura says she threw herself on the bed and succumbed to a fit of weeping. But she had a pass key, and she could have gone next

door and killed Shelley herself, then calmly returned to her room and waited for the discovery of the body."

Jess frowned. "And Walter. No one was on the sun deck with him. He could have come down in the elevator, killed Shelley, and gone back up again, with no one the wiser. It's a self-service elevator. He would have run some risk, but not much. No more than the others. I keep feeling it was a spur-of-the-moment job, anyway."

Jess stopped, thinking about it. Then he went on. "After returning to the sun deck, Walter could have waited for someone to come along and help him discover the body. It would be a good way of throwing off suspicion. The someone happened to be me, which would have made it better than ever."

Jess spread his hands. "So you can't rule out any of them. Motives—Shelley was taking Laura's man. She was Shelley's heir, too, though she claimed she didn't know it until this afternoon, when the family lawyer wired her.

"Then there's Turner. Laura told him Shelley was having an affair with Walter Ring. That's enough to make any man who thinks he's in love commit murder —whether it's the truth or not. Personally, I don't think it was. I think Laura was jus hitting out blindly when she said that.

"And Walter. If he knew that Shelley wasn't going to marry him after all, he might kill, too. He's a very intense and emotional man and he believed he was winning a real game for once in his life."

"Wait a minute," Charley said tensely. "Pedro told me that late yesterday afternoon Walter Ring slapped Shelley in the face. They were in the bar, alone, talking very quietly. And suddenly Walter slapped her. Then he stood up and went around the table, putting his arms around her, trying to smooth it over."

He paused, frowning. "Pedro said that Walter left, then. On impulse he went over to Shelley, and asked her if she was all right. She smiled at him with tears in her eyes, and said, 'Pedro, that's just Walter's way of showing how much he loves me.' "

Jess stood up restlessly. "Laura is a plain girl who doesn't realize what a fine body she has. She'll make somebody—maybe Stewart —a good wife when she finds that a man can love a woman for the way she is, instead of the way she looks. I'm almost glad she's coming into the money—unless, of course, she killed to get it.

"Walter Ring is a self-made man," he went on after a pause. "He knows where he's good, and where his limitations lie. He adapted himself rather successfully to his life and I'm sure he gives value for value received, for there's a kind of twisted integrity

in him. Somehow he doesn't have quite the strength of character it takes to be a professional in his field. He knows that. He knows himself. And though people would sneer at him, call him an athletic bum, I'm sure he sleeps well nights—unless he's the man we're seeking.

"And Stewart. He's a nice, pleasant, amiable guy who's never faced the kind of strain and pressure that Walter Ring has. Maybe he could take it, maybe not. He probably doesn't even know himself. He probably never will face it, for he's got money and he can make people like him. He's intelligent enough and amiable enough to coast through the world without coming up against the pressure. Unless he's done so already—and relieved his inner tensions by killing Shelley."

He turned around. "And you, Charley. You're a real nice guy, with friends all over the world. You've achieved your life's ambition. But if you felt it was being torn down because of a rich girl's whim, you could have killed her, too."

He paused, nodding. "And let's not forget the friend of the wild goose, Captain Morales. He was very good in there with that rope this afternoon. Maybe he was daring me, showing off."

He grinned, faintly. "Bring me a roster of the hotel's guests, Charley, and I'll probably find a motive and an opportunity for all of them. Maybe I'm going about it the wrong way. Maybe I should look for the . . ." He stopped. "It's here—right here in this hotel. All I really need is one more piece of the puzzle."

He tightened his fists, feeling the frustration beating at his temples. He remembered the lead ball he had found on the terrace. He took it from his pocket and showed it to Charley. "Have you ever seen this before, Charley? Or anything like it? I found it on Shelley's terrace—under a lounge chair."

Charley shook his head. "No," he said. "I'm quite sure I haven't. What is it?"

"I had an idea it was the murder weapon," Jess said. "But you couldn't kill anybody by hitting him with this in your fist. If you used it the way you'd use a roll of coins in a fist-fight you might knock him unconscious. But that's all."

Charley got up. "Let me know when you get something," he said.

He opened the door and went out, leaving Jess staring after him, and wondering if he really knew Charley Fink as well as he had thought he did.

He turned back to the window and leaned out. He stared down the side of the hotel, his gaze picking out Walter Ring standing by the parapet on the sun deck. Laura had emerged from her own room

and was standing on the terrace in the open. She was alone, leaning out over the balustrade, gazing toward the room where the murder had been committed. Jess watched her idly for a moment. Then, with a startled look on his face, he looked down at the ball lying inertly in his palm. He whirled and went to the phone.

"Charley's office," he told the operator. Charley came on the line. "Get Captain Morales here," he said crisply. "Right away. Tell him to round up the other three, and we'll all meet in Shelley's room." He paused, briefly. "And don't forget to come yourself, Charley. I'll want you there, too."

Charley's voice was bewildered. "What's all this, Jess?"

Jess smiled, as though Charley could see him. "Get them together, Charley," he said softly. "And send Pedro up to my room immediately. I know now who killed Shelley Cornelius."

## VII

JESS HAD CHOSEN a chair where he could watch them enter. He had taken the police seal off the door, and it stood open. Laura arrived first; she had apparently been in her own room. She hesitated momentarily in the doorway, watching him. Then she came on in. He could tell at a glance that she was nervous.

"What's this all about?"

"Sit down," he said. "The others will be along in a minute or two."

She chose a seat on the divan and sat down, tucking her legs under her. She had changed into a cool linen dress that showed off her figure to the best possible advantage. She looked almost pretty, her high-boned face pale, the lips set firmly by tension. He noticed, for the first time, that her eyes were gray.

Captain Morales bustled in, with Charley Fink right behind him. "What is the meaning of this?" he said. "I personally ordered that door sealed and you've . . ."

Jess cut him short with a conciliatory gesture and a quick smile. "Are you close to catching your thief, Captain?"

The Captain regarded him steadily for a moment. "*And* your murderer, Mr. James. I am questioning a man in my office right now. I will soon have a confession."

Jess stared at him. "Tell me," he said. "What method of questioning does the Mexican police favor, Captain?"

The Captain smiled derisively. "Very scientific," he said. "All the latest psychological tricks."

"Then you should get your confession," Jess said. He watched Walter Ring walk into the room, ignoring Stewart Turner right behind him. "Too bad, Captain. Your confession won't help any.

For the murderer is right here in this room."

His words brought a silence to the room. An electric feeling crackled into the air as they all looked uncertainly at each other.

"Are you sure?" Charley said.

Jess nodded, his face grim. "Sit down," he said. "And I'll show you how a murder was committed this afternoon."

As soon as they had seated themselves, Jess looked around at them slowly. "The murderer always underrates the police," he said. "He believes he can be more ingenious than they, for in his mind they're dull, routine-inhibited clods. But he forgets one thing. The policeman is a professional, while the murderer is always an amateur—an amateur who is playing the policeman's game. That makes a lot of difference. In most cases it means the difference between hanging for his crime and going free."

He stopped again, watching their faces. He could feel the pressure building up. He remained silent for a moment, letting it mount.

"For God's sake, who is it?" Charley Fink said. His voice was ragged. "Tell us now, and let the rest of us go."

Jess shook his head. "Not yet," he said. "First I must show you how it was done. Every one of you had the motive and the opportunity. But only one person was in position to carry out the murder that was committed here this afternoon. That person is the guilty party, for the *method* rules out everyone else."

He stood up, looking around at each of them in turn. "Stewart," he said. Stewart jerked as though a whip had touched his bare flesh. "Stewart was told—and he believed—that Shelley was coming to him second-hand. There are some men who would have wanted to kill Walter Ring for that. But Stewart's not built that way. He'd want to kill the woman.

"And Walter." Walter's head jerked up. "Walter loved Shelley, as none of the others did, not even Stewart. But if he believed she was leaving him, he could kill."

He looked down at Laura. "Shelley was taking your man," he said softly. "When you'd never had a man of your own before. That would justify homicide in your eyes, Laura."

He turned, looking at Charley Fink. "Charley believed she was his jewel thief, tearing down his beautiful hotel's reputation for a caprice. That's where Charley lives—and that's where he'd kill, too."

He smiled at Captain Morales. "And the Captain. Well, he's a professional, too, just like me." He kept on smiling. "Maybe in a different field."

The Captain tried to smile back. But it was not much of a success. "Continue, *señor policía,*"

he said. "And be sure that it's what you Americans would call good."

Jess turned to the others. "So I had more than enough in the way of motive and opportunity," he said. "I had been working on the theory that it was a crime of impulse. But I was wrong. It was all planned cold-bloodedly in advance. I saw that when I turned to the method, thinking that new approach should narrow the field down considerably. And it did."

There was a long silence.

"I don't want any of you to move," Jess rapped. "There's one person in this room who knows what I'm going to reveal. Just one." His voice softened, lowered. "We're playing a game, that person and I. *My* game—for he's an amateur."

Laura stood up. "You're bluffing," she said flatly. "You're showing off. You're trying to make us believe you know more than you do. I'm leaving."

She marched rigidly toward the door. Jess said without raising his voice: "I wouldn't, Laura. if I were you. The first person in this room who goes out that door convicts himself."

Quietly, very quietly, Laura came back to her place and sat down. She reached out for Stewart's hand, holding onto it as though it were a lifeline to safety.

"All right, now," Jess said. "I'm going to show you exactly how the murder was committed. And I'm going to show you the murderer in the act."

He turned and walked toward the bedroom door. "Here's Shelley," he said, pacing back and forth. "She's worrying. She's a nice girl, but she knows she's causing a lot of grief among her friends. There was probably no more sincere and well-meaning person in the world than Shelley—but she knew that Laura and Walter and Stewart were being hurt by her. And she doesn't like to hurt people. So she's pacing the floor, trying to figure out what to do.

"So here she is." Jess kept moving back and forth, slowly, in the center of the room. "She had undressed to lie down for a nap, or maybe take a bath. So she's wearing bra and slip and panties. And a bathrobe—a white, terrycloth bathrobe."

He paused for a moment, his eyes sweeping the room. "The terrace doors are open." He moved forward as he spoke, continuing his pacing. "Someone calls to her. She stops." Jess halted abruptly, his eyes on the terrace doors. He approached the doors slowly, staring inquiringly into the darkness outside.

"You see," he said. "Right here is where she was killed." He pointed to the rug beneath his feet. "And this is how." Jess turned abruptly back to the yawning square of darkness. "Pedro," he

called. "Are you there, Pedro?"

They all saw the lead ball come flying through the terrace doors to land at his feet and roll heavily across the rug.

Jess stooped to pick it up and came quickly back toward the middle of the room, placing himself between the group of people and the outside door.

"That's the way it was," he said. He tossed the lead ball in his hand. "Later the murderer came and let himself in the corridor door. He closed the terrace doors, bolted them, and drew the drapes, so that he would not be seen. He wanted to make it look as though murder came from some other direction—not through the terrace doors at all. That's why he moved her—and took off her bathrobe.

"He dragged the body away from the terrace doors to the center of the room, removed the bathrobe and threw it in the closet."

Jess paused thoughtfully, his lips tightening. "I imagine he wanted to take her all the way into the bedroom. But he was hunting for the lead ball that had rolled back onto the terrace—and he didn't have time. *He didn't have time.*" His words were heavy with meaning.

Charley Fink started to get up, then remembered Jess's stern warning. "This is ridiculous!" he cried in vehement protest. "How could anyone throw that lead ball hard enough and accurately enough to hit anybody, much less kill them? A major-league pitcher couldn't do it."

"Yes," Jess said softly. "That's what stumped me at first, too." He moved closer to them, holding himself tense. "But actually it's easy to understand. Very easy. There's just one way that ball could be thrown with sufficient force and accuracy to kill Shelley Cornelius."

"How?" Stewart demanded, moistening his lips.

Jess stared at him steadily. "With a jai-alai *cesta,*" he said slowly. "By standing on the sun deck and hurling the ball through the terrace windows with a jai-alai *cesta,* getting enough reach and spin and accuracy for murder. It would take an expert jai-alai player."

He looked down at Walter Ring. "You told me yourself you were pretty good at it, Walter. And I guess you were—well, almost a professional. But at murder you're an amateur."

He stood and watched the compact and intense little man wilt before him. Walter Ring's white *guayavera* shirt was sodden, plastered to his torso by the sweat that had broken out all over him. Jess had been right all the way. Walter couldn't withstand the pressure of demonstration, of coming up against a professional in this most deadly of all games. The guilt, the self-betrayal, was as plain in his

face as the glistening sweat.

Jess stepped forward to put a hand on him, while the others watched the sagging small figure with revulsion and horror. But Jess had underestimated Walter's desperation. He jerked up from his chair, his short, lithe, muscular body thrusting Jess aside. With a stricken cry he dashed for the door.

Jess dropped to the floor, whirling on the carpet, stretching out a miraculously steady hand to grab a flying ankle. Walter crashed down heavily, stunned by the impact of the fall, making no immediate attempt to rise. Jess writhed into position and put an arm-lock on him.

"You were never big enough for wrestling, either," he said grimly, as Walter twisted in a final, desperate effort to free himself. "So don't think you'll get away again."

The others were all around them now. Captain Morales swore softly, bent down and snapped a pair of handcuffs on Walter's wrists.

"I suppose I shall have to turn my suspect loose," he said with a sombre shrug. "It is obvious that Walter Ring is guilty, *Señor* Jesse."

Then, abruptly, he brightened. "But why despair? I may still be able to get my man to tell about last year's jewelry thefts. That is an idea."

He led Walter away.

"How did you know?" Charley Fink asked, his hand steady on Jess' arm. "How could you be sure? He was taking a terrific risk of being seen."

"Yes," Jess said. "I didn't know at first, partly because of that risk. It was a calculated gamble on his part. He knew that it was the slow part of the afternoon, and that he'd be just about ruled out as a suspect if he got away with it. I imagine it explains why he was sweating when I first saw him. Walter just couldn't take pressure.

"Fortunately that lead ball kept ticking like a time bomb at my mind, even though I knew it couldn't possible have killed her under ordinary circumstances. And I wasn't even sure that Walter knew she was going to leave him. Not until you told me about him slapping Shelley in the bar last night, Charley."

"But why did you torture us all?" Laura said. She was almost crying, hanging onto Stewart's arm with both hands. "I thought—you were trying to pin it on me."

Jess turned to her gravely. "I wasn't sure," he said. "You did hate her enough, Laura. And you too, Stewart. If another method had been used, it could have been either of you. That ought to be a warning. Love each other like crazy, but don't hate anybody . . . for anything."

"We will," Stewart said. He put his arms around Laura. "She's my girl, Jess. Nothing can change that."

For the first time in her life, Laura's plainness was transfigured into loveliness. It made Jess feel good to see her. He grinned at Charley.

"Come on, old man," he said. "Let's leave these young people alone. Can't you see they want to be alone."

Charley slapped his back and they walked together out of the room.

"A beer," Jess said with relief. "That's what I need. About two good *cervezas*."

Charley shook his head. "Some things still puzzle me. When did he move her body and take off the bathrobe and bolt the terrace doors? He must have come down and then gone back up."

Jess shook his head. "No," he said grimly. "He did it while I was standing outside the door at the elevator, waiting on him. That's why he didn't have time to get her body all the way into the bedroom. He was looking for that ball, and he was nervous about me."

He frowned. "That threw me off, too. He had planned to wait for someone to go to Shelley's room with him. It must have surprised him when I was the first to come along. I've told you he was sweating then. He must have been on the edge of breaking down all the time he was with me."

"But you saw him open the door and go in," Charley objected. "Shelley wouldn't have left . . ."

Jess nodded. "Yes," he said. "She left it open for him. He had told her to leave it unlocked, so he could wake her for a drink afterward. He had it all worked out very cleverly to kill her by remote control." He shook his head again. "He forgot only one thing—that murder is not a game for amateurs."

Charley shivered. "He must have hated Shelley very much."

"No," Jess disagreed. "He loved Shelley deeply and intensely—in his own twisted way. He told me that, and I believe him."

He sighed. "In fact, love caused most of the trouble this time. Laura and Stewart were lying to cover up for each other—each one believed the other had done it."

"You did a good job, Jess," Charley said gratefully. "And a fast one." He frowned. "Now if I just knew who our jewel thief was I'd be happy."

"I doubt if you'll ever be able to do anything about it," Jess said. "But I'd be willing to bet that your cat-burglar was Captain Morales himself."

Charley turned toward him, startled. "You mean that rope-climbing exhibition? But why . . .?"

"Showing off to me, I would think," Jess said. "Daring me to accuse him. Maybe he had the idea, too, of picking up someone, getting a confession of murder, and then blaming the theft on him."

Charley stopped dead still. "But I can't touch him," he exclaimed. "What will I do, Jess?"

Jess grinned. "He hasn't made a try this year," he said. "Mostly because I'm here, I imagine." His grin became broader. "There's just two things you can do—put a barricade on those lower terraces to discourage him in case he does try again—and hire me to come back next year."

Charley laughed. "That's blackmail," he said happily. "Sheer blackmail."

"Yes," Jess said. "As sheer as sixty-gauge nylon. And you can start off by buying me a couple of *Don Equis*. No, I think I'll make it a tequila."

## LAST NIGHT A MAN DIED

### by CORNELL WOOLRICH

A dramatically exciting short novel about mayhem and murder by one of America's truly great mystery story writers. It is a well written story, and is a prime vintage Woolrich with a startling shock content, a brooding dark violence that builds up suspense with terrific power.

# RECITAL

*The slaying was ingeniously planned—*

*There was one small, deadly flaw . .*

**by JOHN SIDNEY**

I HADN'T THE slightest compunction about killing him. I'd have cared more about a fly. Ben Piggott was a whining little thief, a down-at-heel Cockney pickpocket I had hauled out of nowhere. He didn't amount to anything one way or the other. I didn't even hate him. But—well, he got in my way. It was as amusing as hell the way it turned out.

The instant he was out of jail on Thursday morning he phoned


© 1958, by John Sidney

me. It ruined my day. I was sitting in front of the fire looking at the ticket I'd reserved for Zennangin's concert the following night in the Royal Festival Hall. It had been mailed to me from the box office, and I had received it only that afternoon.

I'd go anywhere to hear a great pianist. It's my one weakness, if you want to think of it as a weakness. I was in high good spirits, looking forward to the recital, idly staring at the ticket and the advice slip, when the phone went. I put the advice slip in my breast pocket and the ticket in one of the pockets of my waistcoat, went over to the phone and picked it up.

"I want my share of that dough, Carter," Piggott said.

"Of course," I said quickly. "How are you, old man?"

"You can cut the cackle," he said. "I've had all the cackle I want from you. All I want now is the dough."

"If you want it as badly as that," I said, "I'm at your service."

I was at his service, all right, but not in the way he thought. Fifty thousand quid was a nice sum for one risk taker, but cut in half it didn't add up to much. So I put the plan into operation right at that moment and told him I'd meet him at Victoria Station at five o'clock. He started arguing, insisting he wanted the money immediately, but I cut him short.

You should have seen his eyes pop when I glad-handed him.

"Growing some fungus, I see!" he said.

"I presume you mean my beard?"

"What else?" he said, screwing up his little rat's eyes and smirking detestably. "Improves you, Carter. What happened to your leg?"

"I fell off a bus," I said. "Permanently stiff."

"Bad luck," he says. "Gives you dignity, though."

I cut the conversation short, said, "There's a Brighton train in a few minutes."

"Why Brighton?"

"The money's there," I said, leading the way and limping.

It wasn't.

The first part of the trip was tedious and uneventful. I had to keep my leg out stiffly in front of me and I felt the perspiration trickling down my face beneath the beard. And Ben Piggott's chatter was getting on my nerves.

"I didn't think you'd give in without putting up a fight," he said.

"I keep my word," I said.

The irony of it amused me, and I smiled.

"You'd have been in the clear if it wasn't for me," he said. "I knew from the first it was you. No one else did."

His little Cockney face was smirking again. "You put us away and none of the mugs guessed. We did the fur jobs and ran all the

risks, and you just sat pretty." His eyes narrowed. "Why the beard?"

"A whim," I said.

"Going to do a fadeout?" He grinned. "That's it! That must be it! They're on to you!"

That really annoyed me. "Hell, no," I said. "How could they know? I played it cautious."

"Not cautious enough to fool me," he said.

"You are the exception," I told him. "You're a smart cookie."

"Yes, and don't try any funny business. You wouldn't like the police finding out what I know, would you?"

I told myself, *"Let him shoot his trap off to his heart's content, because he's not going to be able to talk much longer."*

I maneuvered him out into the corridor on the pretext of going to tea in the dining car. I waited until we ran into the tunnel, and the corridor was clear. Then I pulled the door open swiftly with one hand, and shoved him out with the other. He screamed, but I was quite sure that no one heard.

I went on to the dining car, and was ordering my tea when I heard the up train coming.

I stayed in the dining car till we reached Brighton, spent a few hours there, and returned to London without my false beard and the stiff elastic bandage which had given me my stiff right leg.

If any suspicions had been aroused by Piggott's death the police would be looking for a man that didn't exist. Sending him hurtling to his death had been breathtakingly simple, and had merely required a cool head and careful planning.

The next morning I read a small item about Piggott's body having been found in the tunnel. I dismissed him from my mind, and finished my breakfast with my customary zest.

That evening I took my seat, J-twenty, in the Festival Hall. Then a big man leaned over and tapped my shoulder.

"May I have a word with you, sir?" he asked. "Perhaps we could go outside? I want to ask you a few questions about a certain Benjamin Piggott—"

How could I have known? The little pickpocket had spirited the box office's advice slip from my breast pocket, and led the police straight to me-

"He was hardly a highbrow, sir," the detective explained. "So we knew the advice slip would never have been in his possession in the ordinary course of events."

They haven't quite pinned the murder on me, though I think they will. I've made a few slips already. One way or the other, it scarcely matters. I'm going up for twenty years for the fur robberies, and that's a lifetime in jail to a man of my temperament.

# *Complete Short Novels*

## You May Have Missed

*Mike Shayne Mystery Magazine* has become famous for the many fine Short Novels by well known writers it has been publishing. If you've just discovered our magazine you may not have read any of them. We have a limited supply left and they are yours—by filling out the convenient coupon printed below.

**No. 1 . . . DEATH ABOARD THE CRUISER by Frank Ward**
All he really wanted was a firm deck under him—but the tides can spell out grim **murder** too.

**No. 2 . . . MURDER COMES TO THE PLAZA ROYAL by Stewart Sterling**
It was a completely unorthodox murder. No wonder famous hotel detective, Gil Vine, was worried.

**No. 3 . . . THE LONG WALK TO DEATH by Helen Nielson**
The young piano player only thought of Mrs. Jackson. Suddenly, she was holding his life in her hands.

**1 copy @ 35c** **2 Copies @ 70c** **3 copies @ $1**

**RENOWN PUBLICATIONS, INC.**
**501 Fifth Avenue, New York 17, N. Y.**

Please send me the copies of MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE whose numbers I have checked below. One copy at 35¢, two copies at 70¢, 3 copies at $1.00. I enclose $..... in full payment—no additional charges for postage or handling.

No. 1 ☐ No. 2 ☐ No. 3 ☐

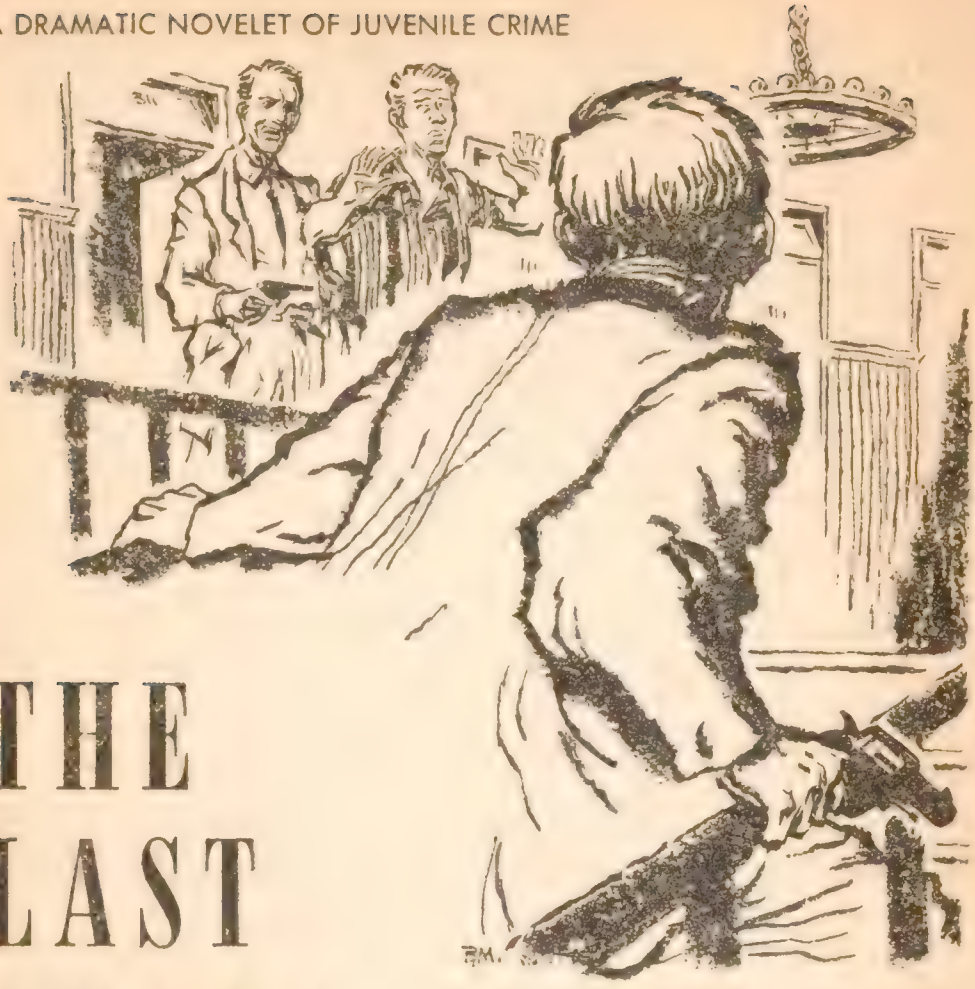
NAME .....

ADDRESS .....

CITY, ZONE, STATE .....

**Please print** MS-36

A DRAMATIC NOVELET OF JUVENILE CRIME



# THE LAST SPOON

**by JOHN JAKES**

*There were several reasons why Phillips Bullock's son couldn't come home. Perhaps murder was one of them . . .*

LONG AGO Phillips Bullock had travelled across the weird, indefinite line which separates the grindstone worker—retiring at sixty-five with a gold watch—from the tiny group of men whose acumen or ruthlessness or luck give them a claim on superiority immediately made known by their unofficial description, a descrip-

© 1958, by John Jakes

tion based on one of the most nebulous words in the English language. Thus while I say about a pal, *He's a policeman,* or about myself, *I'm a private detective,* Phillips Bullock was simply in utilities.

He might have been in steel, in petroleum, or in real estate, but he happened to be in utilities. The suggestion of that nebulous word —no work you can define, just immense power and mysterious, diversified wealth—was awesome as well as irritating. And it matched, in a way, the awesome, irritating decor of Bullock's luxurious penthouse office in one of the city's newer buildings.

Feeling somewhat inferior to the chair in which I sat, I said, "Your son absolutely refuses to return home? What's the reason for his behavior?"

Barricaded behind his large blond desk, with winter sunlight through venetian blinds striping his bald head like the skin of a pink tiger, Phillips Bullock sighed and looked confused and unhappy. He had pouches below his eyes, and a bigger one below his chest. Even his conservatively tailored blue flannel suit, suggestive of dollar signs, could not dim the aura of helpless consternation he radiated like psychiatric b.o.

"Frankly, Mr. Stone, we wish we knew. Gina and I have pleaded with him, begged him, talked ourselves hoarse since first he ran away from prep school in October. He refuses to say a word. He merely tells us he's getting along all right—that he doesn't wish to be bothered."

Ashes accidently spattered on the rug from the end of my cigarette. Bullock looked at me as though I had committed some sort of criminal act. The luxurious office with its haughty receptionist outside and its air of inactivity and wealth was clearly precious to him.

"Where is your son staying now?" I asked.

Bullock's wife spoke then, and I turned as she said, "A filthy, disreputable hotel in the worst section of town. I believe it's called The Gaylord."

That rang nasty bells. The Gaylord Hotel had figured in so many vice raids that television comedians only had to mention its name, or a name remotely like it, to start a rip tide of sniggers through a studio audience. All the mattresses at The Gaylord had legs, and several petty criminals, plus some not so petty, resided therein. A dandy home for a seventeen-year-old kid, I thought.

Gina Bullock held an awkward, gloved hand toward me in supplication. "We contacted you, Mr. Stone, because you have been recommended as an excellent detective, and we want Teddy back, no matter what the cost. We felt that our own resources were exhaust-

ed, that it was time to try a new approach. We don't want you to force Teddy to come back. But we hope you may be able to learn why he ran away, and refuses to have anything to do with Phil and me."

"Quite right," Bullock breathed in a baffled way. "Quite right."

Gina Bullock's comment about exhausted resources made me study her with a sharp, rather impolite eye. She was perhaps twenty years younger than her sixty-five-year-old husband, and her resources had run to fat. Her short Italian-cut hair sparkled synthetically red, contrasting with the powdered wrinkles of her skin.

When I had first come into the office, she had eyed me like a female spaniel cruelly leashed by her master in rage. Now, deliberately, she sat with her legs crossed, so that when I swung to watch her on the sofa near the wall, I could not miss where her skirt ballooned out a bit too much. I didn't like her greedy eyes, but Phillips Bullock was carelessly indifferent. I imagined he was indifferent to everything except utilities.

Coughing and stubbing out my cigarette, I said, "How does your son live, Mr. Bullock? How does he manage to get along? After all, a seventeen-year-old boy isn't exactly capable of supporting himself."

"Teddy is very advanced for his age," Gina Bullock interjected. She was throwing a secretive glance at me again. I felt uncomfortable, so I faced Bullock himself.

"Do you give him an allowance?"

"We did, until he left prep school," the old man answered. "He took nothing with him when he ran away, not a stitch of the clothing he had at school. Naturally we were quite alarmed, but after three days he telephoned, and told us—very grudgingly, I must say—that he was all right. However, when my wife and I called upon him at The Gaylord—"

"You've been there?"

"Three times." I could almost smell the old rugs, the cheap perfume, the liquor odor, as if he had recorded it somewhere inside his brain and played it out like a record, with a distasteful flare of his nostrils.

"He was cheaply dressed, wearing the most garish clothing I have ever seen," Bullock went on. "He had even put a tattoo on his hand, Mr. Stone. What did it say, Gina, do you recall? I was shocked and horrified at the time, and . . ."

"The design was a heart pierced by an arrow," Gina Bullock told me. "Inside the heart were the words, 'Born To Be A Lover.'"

The whole situation had a vicious look. A young kid could only stay alive in a place like The Gaylord by picking up cash in ways

that appeared smart, but usually led to bloodshed and unfortunate legal complications—like ten year prison raps. Instead of warming the hearts of this confused old man and his unappealing wife with this information, I prattled about my fee schedules for a few moments. Then I advised them I would contact Teddy Bullock at The Gaylord Hotel and attempt to learn how he was keeping himself.

"That is about the best I can promise," I added. "I hate to be blunt, but this may turn into a problem for a psychologist."

"We realize that," Phillips Bullock said dismally. "You understand why I have not called the police for help—the publicity and all. But my son cannot receive help if he is unwilling to accept help. Before we can influence him in any way, we must have him back in our home. And that, I'm afraid, we can't accomplish unless we know exactly what he thinks life in a place of that sort has to offer him. Then, I feel, I may be able to compensate for its advantages. If you are able to make him see the light, Mr. Stone, I would gladly triple your fee."

I stood up, not feeling exactly like grinning my broadest. Then I paused mentally, for I suddenly realized that neither Bullock nor his wife had the slightest notion that Teddy Bullock might be in dangerous surroundings. They looked at The Gaylord Hotel and all it represented as some sort of harmless, misguided childish prank.

Teddy, to them, was a boy who rode on the merry-go-round too frequently at the public amusement park, in company with children of inferior station. Their answer was to bring him home and buy a merry-go-round for the basement.

The taste of the investigation turned sour, but I said nothing, beyond telling them I would call as soon as I had something to report.

Phillips Bullock shook my hand. "My son means a great deal to me, Mr. Stone." Before I could say a word, he removed a copy of *The Wall Street Journal* from the top drawer of his desk and began to turn its pages.

I left him with his bald head in the sunlight and his mind on little-boy dreams of capital empires that came true. Gina Bullock stalked me to the reception room.

The secretary was not around. Mrs. Bullock closed the door, turned and moved casually toward me. With a small, embarrassed apology she backed off, but her smile wasn't embarrassed. "Phil is so busy most of the time. You must feel free to call on me in person at home, Mr. Stone. Just telephone in advance, and I'll be delighted to receive you."

"Very nice of you," I said.

I left the office in an unhappy frame of mind. I did not care about the people I was working for, and I doubted whether they cared about their son. Two things stirred me in the case: the fee, and the hope that I might perform some small act of kindness for a kid who might just possibly be in need of help. If Teddy Bullock was not worth bothering about, I did not know quite what I would do, outside of collecting my money.

Stepping into the winter sunlight, I ploughed through a curbside snowbank, crossed the street to a cocktail bar and had a pair of Scotches to erase the memory of a far-from-pleasant interview. Then I went back to my office where the dust and smells were friendly, opened a few letters and waited for the sun to go down. At last it sank like a weary, drink-bleared eye behind the skyscrapers, and I drove reluctantly to the squalid part of town that held The Gaylord Hotel.

I parked behind a sightseeing bus which was just disgorging rubbernecks into one of the strip joints along the thoroughfare, and entered the hotel's dingy lobby. Two pros were powdering their noses by the magazine stand. The seedy clerk was coatless. The poorly-lit room with its cracked leather chairs and decaying rubber plants made vice seem almost geriatric.

The clerk leered professionally and the pros stopped their beauty routine to see if I was ready to bite. Uncooperative me—I flashed my license.

"Tell me which room belongs to Teddy Bullock," I said.

The clerk stared in a cross-eyed way at his dusty ledger. "Sorry, friend, but I don't remember anybody by that name."

"I'm not your friend, unless your memory improves," I said, greasing his greed with a five-dollar bill across the counter.

He screwed his eyes on the ledger again, and I did the same. The Gaylord was certainly a favorite spot for at least one couple. Mr. and Mrs. John Smith had registered five times on a single page. The clerk's thin finger turned back several pages, ran down his dismal record of infidelity and stopped at a name-variant, John Smith's brother Joe. His other hand had already absorbed the five dollar bill, like a flytrap plant closing on a bug.

"You must mean this kid in two-twelve." A knowing, sidewise smile oozed across his features. "I recognized him when he signed in six weeks ago. Them Bullocks get their pictures in the paper a lot, and the old man has been here a couple of times."

"Does he pay his bills regularly?"

"Well, he has so far. I dunno where he gets the cash, but he runs with a fast crowd."

I didn't bother to thank him,

angling instead for the rickety staircase. The two pros followed me with disappointed eyes. On the second floor I padded along the stained carpet, past door after splintered door. Behind panel two-twelve a tinny radio blasted out a cha-cha. I knocked once, raised my eyebrows when a thick feminine voice asked, "Teddy?"

With a wordless grumble I tried to make my reply sound indefinite. The door opened and I shouldered through the opening before the startled cookie could drop her false eyelashes. I wedged my back against the door as she retreated, wide-eyed. The radio built the cha-cha to the whining pitch of a musical orgasm.

"I'm looking for Teddy Bullock," I said.

"He ain't here right now." She wasn't certain of her own anger. "I'm a friend of his, though," she added quickly. "Who are you? Not one of Camino's men. I know most of them."

"Camino?" I said, almost choking. "Alfred Camino?"

"I'm not saying nothing," she said, warned by my startled exclamation. She undulated to the cheap wooden dresser and silenced a cheerful voice extolling the virtues of dog biscuits. Then she turned. I sat on the edge of the bed and saw part of the reason Teddy Bullock found this hotel, this strange life, attractive.

The girl had a cheap, overdressed sort of beauty. Beneath the brick veneer of her orange pancake makeup might once have rested a pretty face. But her skirt was too tight, her blouse too sheer, her ankle-strap heels too high, her legs too professionally wide-spread and taut against the side panels of her skirt. She was the kind of a girl a man might have in a certain kind of dream, exaggerated by a touch of nightmare. She was even a little impressed with her own dime-store superiority.

"You better tell me your name, mister, before I yell."

The license went out for inspection.

"Abel Stone," she read. Then her head came up as if she had been bitten by a spider. "Private detective? Oh—oh." Her mechanically painted red lips parted. "You were hired by Teddy's old man, huh? Well, you're wasting your time, I can tell you. He ain't interested in any offers, or coming back to the dear old homestead. He's told me that fifty times at least."

"How about your name?" I said. "I'm tired of talking so much."

"Miss Chi-Chi Freedman," she said, with a slight toss of her head, as if she honestly didn't know how funny and pitiful she was at that moment.

"Your connection, I guess, is obvious."

"Is that supposed to be a smart

remark?" she blazed. "Is it?"

"Shut up a second," I said, angrily. "Where is the boy?"

"Him and Dallas . . ." she began. Then caution got the better of her once more. "Not here."

"You mentioned Camino. Alfred Camino. He is not a man to fool around with. He runs the slots in this town. Is Teddy working for him? Or fooling with the slots?"

She crossed her arms, and grinned at me cynically. "You gonna get tough with me if I don't answer, the way they do on television, mister detective?"

I came up off the bed with a hot poker of anger branding my brains. "If you don't start being a little more cooperative, we'll see how corny that routine is."

The door to the shabby room opened. I turned, and the kid walked in.

Teddy Bullock's face was as darkly youthful and appealing as it had been in the photograph shown me by his father. But it had been beaten and bloodied into near ruin. Some of the blood had dried on his chin and stained the lapel of his cardigan sport coat. Weaving and blinking, leaning on the arm of a second, older man with blond hair and a narrow, sallow face, Teddy Bullock blundered past me and collapsed face down on the bed.

The other man raked fingers through his oiled blond hair. Then he took out a handkerchief and dabbed at the vicious bruises on his own face. A shredded pink sport shirt and the dusty, wrinkled condition of his clothing showed me he had been in a bad tangle.

Chi-Chi Freedman rushed forward and seized his arm. "What happened, Dallas? My God, what happened to both of you?"

Teddy Bullock groaned. Dallas steered a blind course for a bourbon fifth on the dresser. "Billy Sax and Roy Ryan," he muttered in a faint drawl. "We was eating lunch on the corner, and they picked us up outside. They rammed us into their car, took us three blocks over to a warehouse and beat the hell out of us."

Impotent in his rage, he hit a fist on the dresser top. "Damn them. If Camino and his dirty punks think they can stop us, they're—" Arrested by another of Teddy Bullock's sudden groans, he whirled and for the first time consciously paid attention to me.

"Who the hell is this guy?" he demanded furiously of the girl.

"Private detective," she said. "Sent here by Teddy's folks, I guess."

Dallas gathered his bravado and hooked a thumb in his belt, loped forward, and pushed his battered face under mine. "Look, mister, Teddy don't want no more truck with his family. We're getting along just swell, him and me, and the best thing for you all is to ride along and bother someone else."

"I can see you're getting along swell," I said. "Those Dale Carnegie marks on your face are most becoming."

He didn't understand, so he tried to swing a slap in my direction. I caught it and levered his wrist up behind his back. Then I pushed him hard. He sprawled in a broken-down easy chair and gazed up at me, without the milk of human kindness. "You ugly son . . ." he began.

I let my unruly nature take hold, and laid one across his chops. He sniveled.

Teddy Bullock rolled over and sat up, glassy-eyed. Chi-Chi Freedman fluttered about helplessly for a moment, and then turned on the radio, as if she could think of nothing else to do. From Dallas' coat I picked out a wallet, and saw that his name was Leo Dorbin. His car was registered in the Texas city whose name he'd adopted, and he carried a few pornographic snapshots in with his money.

"Listen," I said. "You I don't give a damn about. The Bullock boy I do—because I'm being paid to take an interest in him. Any more smart talk and I'll lose some more of my temper. Now answer very straight. What's your connection with Alfred Camino? Why did his boys work you over?"

Teddy Bullock massaged his right hand across his forehead. On the back of that hand was the bluish tattoo of a heart pierced by an arrow, and the words *Born To Be A Lover.*

Teddy looked at the girl with puzzled eyes. "Who is that over there, Chi-Chi? Talking to Dallas?"

"A private detective named Stone," she told him.

"What's he want?"

"Your folks sent him."

Teddy Bullock looked as though a steel rod had been inserted at the base of his spine, and rammed straight upward. His eyes took on an angry, furious light. He staggered from the bed. "Get out of here!" he yelled. "I don't want anything from either one of them!" He sailed into me like an hysterical woman, kicking and clawing.

Keeping him at arm's length with one hand, I suddenly knew that I could extract no information about his tie with Camino without really roughing him up, and that, certainly would not endear me to my clients. Baffled and angry, I slugged him in the ribs and landed him back on the bed, where he glared at me.

Dallas instantly produced a .38 from a dresser drawer. "Do as Teddy says," he whispered softly. "Get yourself out, and fast."

I retrieved my hat from the floor, adjusted the crown-crease slowly and deliberately and left the room. Teddy Bullock shrieked a few curses directed at his parents. Chi-Chi Freedman contributed an

obscenity dealing with what I should go and do.

Disgustedly I stalked down the hall as the radio came up full blast. A rock-and-roll record with a male chorus providing a sort of barking-dog accompaniment in hillbilly rhythm brayed sarcastically in my ears.

Driving back to my office, I realized with mild astonishment that I had done absolutely nothing. I had struck out, missed the spare, and withdrawn before the climax. Dandy, dandy, Stone—you wonderful child psychologist.

What I had seen and heard in Teddy Bullock's eyes and voice, however, was not childish anger. It was full-blown, adult hatred. What I needed to know was the nature of his dangerous alliance with Alfred Camino, the slot king. Camino was the sort who customarily fought shy of beatings. He preferred nice, simple bullets.

If Teddy Bullock was in a jam, it was still my job to get him out. Dallas Dorbin struck me as a type I'd seen before—the hoodlum as transient as a migratory worker. Perhaps he had talked Teddy into a deal. I wanted to define the deal and get the Bullock boy out before he got shot, as I was afraid would happen if he messed overlong with Camino.

I realized I could beat Dallas or Chi-Chi or Teddy long and hard and still learn nothing. The very fact that I worked for Phillips and Gina Bullock would seal their lips against pain for a long time. Thus I knew I had to move fast to the only other source that might tell me: Camino himself. Maybe I could settle the rumble before it resulted in more than a beating. I didn't know, but with a lion's den feeling, I returned to my office and began making frantic telephone calls.

Finally, on the sixth call, I arranged an uneasy interview, solely on the strength of my friendship for a rather good natured hoodlum named Edgar Clock, one of Camino's half brothers in what purple prose defines as the twilight world of crime.

Far from the quality of twilight, Alfred Camino resided in the very brightest rays of public availability, as everybody knew. To be specific, in The Henry VIII Arms. The only difficulty was accessibility. Hard faces peered at you in a hostile way over the top edges of unread newspapers in the glass-walled lobby. Hard faces floated beside you into the elevator, and the boy stared at his shoes indifferently.

Hard faces flanked the rococo doors of the penthouse, the stone bodies beneath them sitting stiffly on straight chairs. The coats of the quiet lads hung open, and flush against their neatly-monogrammed, Egyptian-cloth shirts rested the sweaty leather of very well used gun rigs. Thus the mighty

sat. At least the Filipino boy in the white jacket was a relief. His face was like wood.

Down three steps I walked into a sunken living room sprinkled with several sets of furniture. Near one wall a fat hanger-on surveyed a built-in color television set as he reposed belly down on a leather table, a towel across his middle, under the broiling rays of a sunlamp. A young woman crossed the room with a highball in her hand and disappeared, wearing only a brassiere.

The glass walls looked loftily down upon sparkling windows of lesser towers. And in the midst of it stood a tiny black-haired man with olive skin, a high collar, and the fire of a diamond on his little finger. As two faces of stone escorted me through the tundra of thick carpet, I heard Alfred Camino, bail-bond businessman and slot machine king, waspishly advising his attentive tailor to avoid cholesterol in his diet at all costs.

One of the stone faces gave me a derogatory shove forward. I ignored the shove with some effort. Camino snapped his fingers. The tailor, his mouth full of pins, melted away to fuss over several bolts of cloth.

Camino tucked back his trousers with bony hands and sat "You stand," he announced matter-of-factly. As he looked at me, tiny black eyes unreadable, I felt as though someone had applied two-bit braces to my soul. I wondered if he could also see through walls. He snapped his fingers and the Filipino crossed the room toward him with a massive crystal Martini bowl.

Camino said, "Edgar Clock fixed this for you, Stone. Understand, I got no friendly feelings for detectives of any size, shape or form." His dazzling smile went on and off so abruptly that it left me wondering about my sanity. That, I decided, was its purpose.

"All I want is to possibly save you trouble, Camino," I said.

The smile vanished. "Don't you know that all my boys refer to me as Mister Camino?"

"If your boys had gone past the third grade," I told him, "I might wonder about that."

Behind me the stone faces stirred with guttural sounds. Camino squinted, his face darkening. "I got no time for a contest making funny remarks. You want to talk business, go ahead. Otherwise you can vacate these premises and tell your funnies to the elevator boy."

"Two of your men, Billy Sax and Roy Ryan, worked over a couple of guys this afternoon," I said. "One was a hood with a Southern drawl called Dorbin. The other a kid, Teddy Bullock."

I gave it straight, trying to ignore the flick of his eyes past my shoulder. Perhaps Sax and Ryan were among the stone faces, and I was in the middle of contempt. I

went on, "The Bullock boy ran away from home. His parents hired me to return him, or at least find out what sort of trouble he's gotten into. Remember he's a kid, under age. He wouldn't tell me why he got the beating. Your name came up. So here I am, asking you, before he draws a bullet."

Camino nodded slowly. "And he will, too, Stone. Very soon. The very next time he and his hayseed pal spoon one of my slots."

"Come again?"

Memory brought sudden rage. Camino leaped up, sloshing his drink purposely on the rug. "That smart little turkey came up with some kind of home-made gadget to trigger the payoff levels on my machines. A regular little Einstein! He and the joker from Texas have been waltzing all over town the past month—using their gadget, spooning the machines, taking the coins. You know how much my accountants figure we lost? Ten grand. Can you imagine? Ten grand in less than thirty days."

Camino stabbed a bony finger in my direction. "I tell you this, mister detective. They may be out spooning again tonight. If they are, you're too late, because I'll cut them down to size, and you, too, if you try to mess me up."

"Then I'll get the kid out tonight," I said, meanining it. "If I have to carry him in a sack."

"You understand me, then, mister detective." Camino chuckled pleasantly, sat down, and snapped again for the Filipino.

"No, I don't understand you. I know you'll kill him, though."

"What kind of talk is that?"

"Never mind. I've got what I want."

"Good. Like I tell you, make him quit tonight, no hard feelings. But he's spooned my slots his very last time, whether he's kid or not. I got myself to protect, you understand. So take him back to mama and papa before you got to call the funeral parlor."

I turned to leave and he said, "Clock had you sized up straight. If we can do business any more, call me up here at the hotel. I'll put you on my list to talk direct."

Perhaps I said thanks, I don't remember. The girl in the brassiere walked past again as I crossed the carpet. The elevator seemed to have broken all but one operating part—almost an hour, I thought, went by before we reached the street. Sweat made a cold coating on my skin. I had been told by the little pinched face, the bit-brace eyes, the quiet power, that Teddy Bullock would die if he spooned a slot again, and I have heard enough men talk of killing to know the sound of true intent when I hear it.

It took me only twenty minutes, then, to reach my office, strap on my shoulder rig and get myself into the corridor outside Teddy Bullock's room at The Gaylord Hotel.

I raised my fist to knock, then paused. Someone was playing music with a beat on creaking bedsprings.

Damn silly little fool, I thought, turning the unlocked handle.

Chi-Chi Freedman screamed shrilly and began to curse me in unprintable language. Teddy Bullock gaped up at me, looking strangely innocent and helpless, small-boned and young—for a moment a baffled, thoroughly scared apprentice to this ugly little room and all it represented.

"Get yout clothes on," I said to the boy. He looked squarely at my .38. "I mean this, Bullock. We're getting out of here before Camino spills some of your blood. Where's Dorbin?"

Lunging from where she had been standing by the bed, Chi-Chi went after my face like a cat. I backhanded a slap with my left hand and she sprawled on a corner of the bed, awkwardly and grotesquely and wide-eyed with hate but moving no more. My fingers bit into Teddy Bullock's shoulder. "Did you hear me, kid? I talked with Camino. It may be a joke, rigging a gimmick to take cash out of his slots. But Camino lives on that money. He told me the next time you did it, you were dead. For the sake of your mother and father, that next time isn't coming."

Instantly a strange and twisted look of vituperation returned to the boy's features. "For them? No, thanks, mister . . ."

I swung him around and gave him a slap. "I don't give a damn what you want," I said. "I'm doing my job. I tell you Camino will kill you. Do you want that? Nice bullet holes up and down your ribs?"

He glared at me and tightened his lips.

"Do you know how many men Camino employs?" I went on relentlessly. "Probably a hundred. Say you fool one, or two. There's still three and four and five and six, all with the same orders."

Reluctantly he continued to dress, somewhat cowed by my shouting and my slap and my .38.

Pulling a knit shirt over his head, he said with sudden, surprising docility, "Where are we going?"

"Never mind. What happened to your friend Dorbin?"

"You wait till he gets back!" Chi-Chi Freedman shrieked. "That's what *I'm* waiting for!"

I often can't resist a vicious impulse. "He'll finish it all for you, sweetheart," I told her. Teddy Bullock averted his eyes, his face scarlet. I regretted my words. Dallas, I learned after repeating my question, had journeyed out for several packs of cigarettes. Chi-Chi put forth a few feeble pleas, urging Teddy to remain. Then she began reviling him as a coward. Again Teddy watched my .38. He

finished dressing and told me quietly he was ready. I opened the hall door, stepped out, and saw the blond head of Dallas Dorbin rise above the stair landing. When he spotted the pair of us, he charged.

"Where you goin'?" he demanded.

"I'm taking him out of this flytrap, Dorbin. You're the punk that probably talked him into working up the spoon gadget."

Dorbin's teeth separated several inches in astonishment. "Hey, kid!" he demanded, looking sharply at Teddy. "He ain't talking you into going back to those crummy folks of yours, is he?"

I showed him the .38, high up, near his mouth, where he could easily view it. "Like to have a debate about it? I'm very good at argumentation."

Dorbin's fists balled. "You ain't going. . . !"

Teddy Bullock stared miserably at the opposite wall. Dorbin saw the signals, cursed and stamped hard on my left foot.

Fire engines of pain went on emergency call along every nerve in my body. Dallas worked my gun wrist like the head of a rag doll, straining, grunting, trying desperately to break bone. I let him have it in the groin. He spun against the wall, palmed a small, nickeled pistol suddenly and just as suddenly its black muzzle was pointed straight at my skull.

I let go with a blast of the .38. Dallas took the bullet in the left thigh. He staggered back, coughed and swore. I grabbed the collar of his shirt, and pitched him headlong into the room.

Then I propelled Teddy Bullock out of the room and down the stairs to the street.

He breathed sharply until we reached my automobile. Climbing inside, I touched the ignition and got rolling with one hand.

Two blocks from The Gaylord I said, "What changed your mind? Why didn't you fight? You fought this afternoon."

"You said this Camino meant to kill me. The gadget was kind of a joke. I don't want to get killed, that's all. I believe what you said."

"Can I put the hardware away?"

"I guess so."

We rolled on through the white lonely insulation of the rising snow storm. Thus far I had been driving with little sense of direction. The boy must have sensed this, for he said suddenly, "Where are you taking me? To the police?"

"No, not to the police."

A look of bitterness and despair came into his eyes, and he was a child again, about to cry. "Not back to them," he said. "Oh, God, no. Please—not back to them."

I knew then that my conviction that the last battle had been won was a complete illusion, and that the worst lay ahead. In a moment's time, I saw behind the mask

f quick, impulsive toughness to he uncertainty of the not-quite-man, making the whole problem a little more than a job.

My curiosity won over. We stopped at a lunch wagon. I picked up a cardboard carton of coffee, and my passkey took us into the silence of a dead office building.

"I have to finish a report," I told him.

He sat sipping coffee from the paper container as I fiddled with papers on my desk.

"Now look," I said finally. "If you don't relish the idea of returning to your parents I'm not sure I have the right to yank you back. Your dad gave me no orders to bring you back. He didn't think I could."

"When you *make* me go back—what choice have I got?"

"Well, why don't you want to? Suppose you tell me."

"What difference does it make to you?" he said, with the warning barriers rising behind his eyes.

"Well, I'd like to give you a break. And I can see that the thought of your mother and father is like—well, like needles in your nerves."

"Needles in my nerves." he echoed wanly. "That's pretty good."

Yes, it's wonderful, I thought—you lamebrain amateur psychiatrist. But, amazingly, it made him talk. Down went the barriers. With little emotion showing but a great deal, I guessed, driving him inside, he spelled it out for me.

My wrist-watch ticked off the night while he told me why he did not want to return to his parents. It was a long, rambling, narrative, filled with half-starts, unfinished sentences, exaggerations, sudden bitter cries of protest—all the strange, involuted wanderings of the tortured adolescent mind.

I came briefly to know Phillips Bullock as the kind of man he appeared to be. He would buy the merry-go-round for the cellar, but he bragged about his love for his son while his eyes checked off the closing prices for Abbott Labs, first on the stock exchange list.

"He's in business," Teddy said once during the long narration. That was his explanation, his final answer, his crucifixion. Phillips Bullock was in utilities, and to be in utilities, you must be isolated from your home, your family, your obligations as a father, the responsibility that can make a companion of a growing son.

Not that the boy once mentioned the absence of love, or even spoke the word. His mouth went wry and sour at the concept. Then, softly, like the final horror, came the story of his sudden return from prep school. The key in the lock; the empty apartment, with Bullock away somewhere in Bermuda merging or declaring dividends; the softly whispered words; the strange man; and the unfaithful

and insensitive woman in a red nightgown, shamelessly wanton in the dimness of the bedroom. The final betrayal, the last cruel denial of a good world.

"They're all like that," he declared softly. "Like that Chi-Chi Freedman. All they want . . ."

"Some aren't," I said.

"Don't snow me."

"Some aren't, kid. I had a wife that died. She wasn't."

He couldn't call me a liar. Instead he said, "You think so?"

"Look in the right places, and you'll find one. Then maybe you could give some other kids, your own, what you didn't get. You ought to know all the mistakes by now. You should never make them again."

He fell silent. Then, doubtfully, "Look, the sky's light. You want to go?"

In that instant I may have made the greatest mistake of my living life. I'll never know, since I never saw Teddy Bullock again after that dawn. I said, "I won't take you back. I wouldn't take you back now for a million bucks. You're old enough to make up your mind. Hell," I sighed, "you can even go back and see your friend Dallas. Maybe it would be better."

"No, I don't want that."

We hatched a plan, and if I did the wrong thing, then the guilt is mine alone. I gave him cash to tide him over for a day or two, found him a decent, inexpensive hotel room, and bought him breakfast. I left him on the steps of the Federal building, gazing uncertainly at the Air Force recruiting posters. He was of the right age, and perhaps he might someday with luck look as cheerful as one of those four-color boys printed in uniform, beckoning eagerly on the metal display boards in front of the recruiting office.

We shook hands. I turned up my coat collar against the thin snowfall, and when I looked back a moment later he had vanished inside the Federal building.

"I saw him," I said to Gina Bullock that morning in her apartment. "He threw me out. When I returned later, he had gone—checked out. Frankly, Mrs. Bullock, I'm sorry, but I've failed. I think you had better forget about it, or hire someone else. He was pretty vehement when I saw him. He refused to return. He said he liked that kind of life."

I tried to act shocked. "He was living a pretty sordid existence, I'm afraid. You can do just so much—"

"Perhaps so," she said. She had the escape now which she had wanted all along and with a sigh of relief she edged up close, crinkly in a pink gown, smelling of perfume. "Why did he run away, Mr. Stone? Did you find out?"

"No, I'm afraid I didn't. He wouldn't say."

"Phillips will be terribly upset. But Mr. Stone . . ." Her leg touched my leg again. "Thank you for your effort. Phillips will send you a check. Could I get you something to warm you up before you go?"

I thought of the tattoo *Born To Be A Lover*. Not lover, but loved. The woman's nearness angered me. I excused myself hastily and left.

Disconsolately I returned to the office, and worked on several other case reports. In the evening papers I noted that one Dallas Dorbin had been found shot to death on a highway embankment outside the city at dawn, with eight bullets in his body. I had shot him but once. There had been some sort of pecular mechanical gadget in his pocket. And Camino's hoods obviously hadn't liked that one bit.

So he hadn't gone for cigarettes after all. Why hadn't Teddy Bullock accompanied him? I wondered if, this time, a sordid episode in a hotel room might not have been an inscrutable act of mercy, beyond the understanding of a simple guy like myself.

## SATELLITE and SHORT STORIES

When the redhead greets you from the newsstands with his rugged "There's crook trouble ahead" look there's a flanking movement surrounding him of two other magazines—MIKE SHANYNE'S companions in reading thrill entertainment. SHORT STORIES, America's oldest all-fiction adventure magazine has a man's interest punch ready and waiting, directed against all adventurous scoundrels from Bombay to Key West. And SATELLITE SCIENCE FICTION stresses high adventure and mystery too—prophetically, on frontiers of tomorrow.

# angels that fall

by H. A. DeROSSC

*The girl he'd married was frightened . . . and the desert cast long, chill shadows.*

HE LEFT HER weeping and went outside and stood in the cold desert wind coming off the Mojave. The wind flicked sand across the asphalt floor of the motor court. A grain of grit stung his cheek, another caromed off his hand. He stood, unmoving and silent, feel-


© 1958, by H. A. DeRosso

ing very much at home in the chill, mourning wind.

Lights flickered in the darkness as though blinking against the force of the wind. The sky was black; not a star showed. It made him remember the contrast as the two of them had left Santa Rosa early that morning. Then the day had been bright and clear with not a trace of the usual early morning California fog. It had stayed that way until they had topped the pass at Tehachapi and then descended to find the Mojave clouded and gray and cold.

He wondered how such a change could be, not only in the land and weather, but in him and her. They had been married that morning. Nothing had happened to make him doubt that evening would find her affectionate and eager. He had never thought to find her resistant and frightened and weeping.

The wind sighed and he sighed with it. He had not known her long, he told himself—only two weeks. He would have to be patient. As sure as he was that she was very much in love with him, he would have to give her time. In some ways they were still strangers.

A car pulled off the highway and came to a stop in front of the neon that spelled OFFICE. The driver got out and for a moment stared across the court, selecting him out of the shadows and studying him ever so briefly. Then the driver was gone, into the office.

"Bill?"

He came to with a start. He had not heard the door open behind him. He was not aware of her until she spoke.

"It's cold out there. Don't you think you'd better come inside? You're not even wearing a jacket."

He sighed, silently this time. Her words were in keeping with the situation. They sounded properly solicitous and tender. Everything was just as it should be, everything but one.

"Okay, Hazel," he said.

In the light, in the housecoat with the pink hem of her nightgown showing around her bare ankles, she looked dark and fragile and achingly beautiful. He had all he could do to keep from sweeping her into his arms but he made himself remember that he had been rejected not so long ago. He did not think he could bear another rejection so soon. She must have sensed what he was thinking for her eyes turned sad.

"Please, Bill," she said, low and timid and pleading. "Give me a little time. Will you do that much? I love you. Have no fear of that. Just give me a little time?"

This disappointment he put somewhere within him and closed a door on it. He smiled, if only with his lips. "Sure, Mrs. Graber," he said. "I can wait. Mrs. Graber," he repeated softly, and tried not

to heed the ache in his throat. "I like the sound of that."

Her answering smile was wan. She looked beyond him when she spoke, into some secret distance visible to her alone. "I like it too, darling." But the words, to him, sounded wooden

Silence came, awkward and embarrassed. Just to be doing something he got a pint out of their luggage and poured himself a drink. Only at the last moment did he remember her.

"You want one, too?"

"No, thank you, dear," she said in a small, tired voice. With his back to her he heard the bed sheets rustle and a touch of sorrow and bewilderment came. "Goodnight, Bill."

"Goodnight, Hazel."

He turned out the light and undressed slowly. In bed he could hear the soft sound of her breathing but he could not tell if she really slept or was simply pretending to be peacefully slumbering at his side.

He lay there quietly, thinking, listening. A gust of wind flung grit against the door with an audible sound. In the darkness something gathered, something looming and ominous that he could sense but not discern, the initial stirrings of doom, the faint fore-runners of heartache . . .

SHE WAS ALL a-chatter the next morning. "We're going to see Boulder Dam, aren't we, dear? You don't mind my picking the route? I know it sounds silly and foolish to you, going south like this before we turn north. It would have been much shorter going by way of Route Thirty but I went that way once and—well, I've always wanted to see the Southwest. Will you stop off at the Grand Canyon, too? Do you think we'll see it today?"

"I don't see why not," Graber said.

Morning had found the sky cloudless, the sun glancing with eye-catching brightness off the sands of the Mojave. But the air was chill, here in April. At intervals frost glistened among the sage and greasewood and mesquite.

She nestled close to him so that he could feel her warmth. For an instant something angry mixed in with the hurt. So much gaiety and promise during the day but at night—He stared hard at the bright desert waste, as if to blot out the thought.

"You've been a doll, dear. I wouldn't have complained if you'd grouched over the route I picked. Most husbands would have, even if it *is* our honeymoon."

Something seemed to sober her and make her stare straight ahead, suddenly silent. He felt himself grow somber, too, and a trifle bitter. He felt he should say something.

"I don't mind taking a roundabout way," he said. "What's a day or two more? There's no hurry to get home."

"Is it cold there now?" she asked. "In northern Wisconsin?"

He smiled faintly. "There's probably still snow."

"Snow?" she shuddered. "But I suppose I'll have to get used to it, won't I?"

"It won't be so bad," he said. "The tourist season is over the end of September and I close my resort then. We'll go south for the winters. Oh, you'll like it, Hazel. I know you will."

A car passed them, going fast. It was a black and red Olds.

"What's he trying to do?" Graber growled. "Match the speed of sound?"

She was suddenly silent. He felt her pull ever so slightly away from him. When he glanced at her, he saw that her face was pale and taut.

"Don't you feel well?" he asked, quickly concerned.

She came to with a start. Her fingers fumbled in her bag, then came out empty as though they had forgotten what they had been seeking. "No." Her breath made a sighing sound as she inhaled. A smile framed her lips. "No, dear. I'm quite all right."

He sensed the falseness in the words but he said nothing. He stared at the road and at the desert passing by. The desert growths hunkered sparse and lonesome. For a moment he felt the sad breath of their isolation and forsakenness.

In Arizona the sky clouded again and he felt himself pass into the mood of the day. His thoughts turned somber and gray, words would not come to his tongue. She sensed the change in him and grew silent, too.

There was a misgiving needling him that he could not understand. For the first time he asked himself, Why did I marry her? The obvious answer—*because I love her*—he put aside. He tried to remember little things that would have escaped his notice during the happy, heedless days of courtship. Did any of them hold any hidden meaning? He went back over the beautiful memories and found that some of them already held the faint taste of the bitter-sweet.

He remembered now that she had started it. They had been sitting in a bar, strangers to each other, with an empty stool between them. It dawned on him only now that she had come in the place after him and had kept glancing at him.

"Is that your car outside?" she suddenly asked him. Her smile was white and flashing. Dancing lights showed in her dark eyes. "The one with the Wisconsin license plates?"

He nodded. "That's right."

"I used to have a girl friend

who was from Wisconsin," she said, "when I lived in San Diego. She used to tell me how beautiful the summers are there. Is that true?"

"I don't dare say different," he said, grinning. "I'm in the resort business. I can't knock my bread and butter."

"Then you must be from the northern part," she said. "That's where my friend said the resorts are."

"You can't go much farther north," he said, "not in Wisconsin. My place is in Iron County."

"I don't remember my geography too well," she said. "That's close to Canada, isn't it?"

"Lake Superior's in between," he said. "It's not too far through northern Minnesota though." He felt his heart skip a beat. "Will you have a drink with me?"

She smiled and nodded. "I'm Hazel Armacost," she said.

"I'm Bill Graber."

"What's the matter, dear?"

He returned to the present with a start. She was staring at him with a searching look. He could not meet it and shifted his glance back to the road. Something like shame moved in him, for his thoughts, for the uneasy inkling for which there was no excuse.

"I'm all right."

He could feel the examining look still on him. "Are you tired? I'll drive."

For the first time irritation stirred in him. But he kept his voice quiet and bland. "Later. I'll let you know when I'm tired. Why don't you try to sleep?"

She began to nod as they started the climb into the timbered mountains. Large raindrops spattered the earth, then the torrent came. Past Williams snow mixed in with the rain. Thunder clashed with ear-shattering cacophony. The thunder woke her. She looked sleepily about.

"Have we reached Williams yet, dear?"

"We passed it."

He heard the sharp breath of surprise and disappointment. "But that's where you turn off for the Grand Canyon."

He shrugged. "The weather's too bad." He smiled at her. "We'll catch it another time. We'll be out here again. We'll be out here many times."

Her eyes were large. He thought he detected a touch of anxiety in them, but for what he could not guess. "We're staying overnight at Flagstaff, though, aren't we?"

He stared at her. "It's still early. We could make Winslow easy, or farther."

"But I had planned on Flagstaff." She pouted. "I know it's asking a lot to humor me but that's how I planned this trip and it is our honeymoon, dear."

Yes, our honeymoon, he thought, and felt a foreboding of futility. He tried to put the feeling

from him. Tonight was another night. Perhaps tonight— But the grayness in him would not go. It clung stubbornly, along with that other something, that new something which was strangely and frighteningly akin to a prescience of disaster.

FROM THEIR motel he could look down on the lumber mill. The exhaust of the narrow-gauge steam engine hauling a string of logs rang sharp and echoing in the thin mountain air. The rain had stopped, the sky was clearing, and the high peaks were glaringly white with snow.

He carried their luggage in. He took too many bags and one of hers slipped from his grasp. She cried out sharply, then bit down on the hand that flew to her mouth as if that would negate and recall the sound she had made. For an instant her eyes were wide. With fright? He began to think that his mind was starting to play tricks on him.

"There's no harm done," he said. "Just a bump. Nothing's busted."

She got up from examining the bag. "I wish you'd be more careful," she said with the first asperity he had ever encountered in her. "I paid good money for that."

It was cold at this high elevation and he changed to a heavier shirt. She put on a sweater beneath her jacket. They walked downtown with the wind damp and cold on their faces. It was late afternoon and the streets were abustle with people on their way home from work. He noted the Indians, the bucks in high-crowned hats and levis, the squaws in their brightly colored blankets, and an occasional papoose looking out with childish, stolid indifference from his wrappings.

They stopped in for a couple of drinks and then they ate. They were strangely silent. It seemed that somehow they had exhausted all topics of conversation. Surprisingly, he preferred it that way. It afforded him time to think.

On the way back they passed a motor court a block from their own. He glanced at a car parked there and a tingling started on the back of his neck.

He tried to keep his voice calm and conversationally curious. "Isn't that the Olds that passed us early this morning?"

He thought her stride faltered but it was so slight he could have credited it to his imagination. "Olds?" she echoed.

"That black and red one." He peered. "With the Colorado plates."

She threw it a passing glance. "How should I know? I didn't pay it any attention."

They walked the rest of the way in utter silence. He was thinking hard now, and remembering.

She took off her jacket and sank

down in an easy chair with a sigh of weariness. He turned the light on for it was growing dark. A crease formed between his eyes as he recalled something.

"It was the one that stopped at the same motel we did last night," he said half to himself. "I'm pretty sure. That one was black and red, too, and an Olds. I didn't catch the plates then."

She said nothing.

He stared at her. She had kicked off her shoes and drawn her kegs up under her. In the chair she looked small and tired and helpless. Her eyes gazed past him, dark and haunted. The faintest lines edged her mouth.

"What's wrong, Hazel?" he asked, softly, gently.

Her eyes came back to the present with a betraying quickness. He thought her mouth paled a little.

"Nothing. Why do you ask?"

"Are you afraid of something? Is there something on your mind?"

Her laugh did not quite ring true. "Have you been sneaking drinks?" she asked.

"I'm dead serious, Hazel."

She passed a hand across her eyes. "Please, dear. I'm tired. I'm getting a headache. Let's not argue. Please."

The surge of anger got the best of him before he could check it. "Are you starting the same thing as last night?" He was instantly sorry but the words could not be recalled.

He saw the tears come, from the deep, haunted wells. When they trembled on the long, dark lashes he knew he could not endure them. He grabbed his jacket before the sobs came and went outside, all afire with rage and exasperation and futility.

He found himself downtown, about to enter a bar, when he got himself in hand. It took all his will to turn away and start back. His steps dragged; reluctance held him back with detaining fingers.

He stopped when he came to the motel and saw the Olds. For a while he stared at it, thinking, wondering. It looked innocuous enough. There were many red and black Olds', even with Colorado plates, he told himself. Still, something drew him over to take a closer look at it.

There came a sound as of someone clearing his throat. Graber started. First of all he saw the red glow of a cigarette in the shadows, then the slight, slim build. There was not much else to see. The glow faded and a moment later the throat was cleared again.

"Looking for something, Jack?"

"For a dream, buddy," Graber said, "a dream that's lost."

He heard a puzzled sound and then he was walking away.

Their room was dark. For a moment he knew a singe of panic that made him fear she was gone. Then he heard her soft, measured breathing, the breathing of sleep

or a very close imitation of it.

He sank down in the easy chair, amid the gloom, amid the faint sadness that seemed to permeate the air. He sat and thought and wondered for a long time . . .

In New Mexico he bought a pistol. He pulled over to a roadside place that advertised itself as a gun museum. He studied the collection of old muskets and dueling pistols and six-shooters and rifles. He bought a second-hand Smith & Wesson .38 that appeared to be in good condition. He also bought some cartridges.

Hazel said nothing until they were underway again. She poked gingerly at the package containing the gun and shells. "Why did you buy this?" Her voice was small and timid.

He kept his eyes on the road. This was high country here, near the Divide. Cedar and juniper were green, stunted growths. The sky was overcast. The smell of rain or snow was in the bitter air.

"I like guns," he said. "I figure this was a good bargain."

She did not believe him. She said, "Is it because that car passed us up again?"

So she had seen the Olds. He had not asked her at the time. He felt his lips grow stiff. Something uneasy clambered down his spine.

"Maybe."

"He's just going in the same direction. What's wrong with that?"

He said nothing. He wanted to see if she would drop it or go on. She went on.

"Colorado's north of here, isn't it? That's where he's going."

"Is he? He was aware of her sharp, startled glance. "Why does he pass us up and then fall behind, then pass us again? The way he drives he should have been in Colorado yesterday."

"There are drivers like that," she said in a low, small voice. "They barrel along for a while, then stop. You keep going steady."

Suddenly he was tired of it. He did not want to talk about it any more. He put on a smile he did not feel to reassure and placate her.

"I'm a worrier, Hazel," he said. "You'll just have to get used to that."

She made no answer. She sat up against the door with her hands in her lap and her eyes on the floor. Once she shuddered, as from a chill or a brush of horror. Then she grew very still. She did not seem to even breathe any more . . .

They reached Dalhart, in the Texas Panhandle, after dark. The wind blew hard and strong across the prairie. It hurled grit against the buildings, it moaned and cried around the eaves.

Just one motor court still had vacancies. She carried her luggage in by herself. He raised a brow at that but said nothing. He could sense the two of them pulling away from each other, each one

headed toward an opposite pole. It filled him with sadness, for all at once he had stopped hoping that things would change for the better. Love was dying and there was nothing he could do about it but stand around helplessly and watch, the taste of gall in his mouth.

They ate at a restaurant and returned, walking slowly, speaking not a word. He pulled a chair over by a window and sat, peering out through a crack in the curtain. She watched him with silent apprehension.

He had just begun to think that all his fears had been groundless when a car pulled in. He heard the hard hammerstroke his heart gave. Then he turned quite calm. The anger in him was caged, contained. He rose without hurry and got the pistol he had bought that morning. Hazel watched with widened eyes as he loaded it.

"Bill?" Her lips barely moved, her whisper was scarcely audible. But the terror was there, and the pleading. "Bill?"

"I'm going to find out," he said in a low, purposeful voice. "I'm going to find out once and for all."

He looked at her. Her face was white, tears glistened in the dark eyes. He looked away quickly because he was determined that nothing would stop him.

"Unless *you* want to tell me."

He waited but she did not answer.

He had to rap twice before the door opened. He saw the look of consternation, quickly masked, on the slim, boyish face. The youth was suddenly tense, like a vigilant animal.

"What do you want?"

Graber pushed his way in. He glanced quickly around but the youth seemed to be the only one there. An open overnight bag lay on the bed. There was no other evidence of occupancy.

"Why are you tailing me?" Graber asked. He could feel the hard sag of the pistol in his back pocket.

The youth glanced quickly, longingly, at the open bag. He was in his shirt sleeves. There was no bulge or hint of a weapon about him.

"You crazy?" he asked. "You off your nut?"

"You've tailed me ever since I left Santa Rosa. You stayed at the same motel in Barstow. You were only a block away in Flagstaff. Now you're here. What gives?"

"Don't I have a right to stay where I want to?"

Graber took a menacing step forward. "I'm going to find out, kid. One way or another I'm finding out."

He saw the panic flare in the youth's eyes and as he whirled and dived for the open bag Graber moved with him. They landed with a crash on the bed. Graber could feel the frantic pawing and search-

ing among the contents of the bag. He jumped to his feet and took out the .38.

The youth blanched as he looked into the bore. His frenzied fingers stilled. He seemed to tense and gather, like a cat preparing to pounce. His right hand was out of sight beneath the clothing.

The door opened behind Graber's back. A chill from the blowing wind froze his spine. Then he heard her voice.

"Bill. Please. You don't know what you're doing."

He would not take his eyes off the youth. "He's got a gun in there. I want to know why."

"You've got one, haven't you?" the youth snarled. There was no more fear in him. Graber wondered.

"Take your hand out—empty," Graber said.

The youth's mouth framed an obscene expression, silently.

"You heard me," Graber said, his voice hard.

"Please, Earl," Hazel cried.

Afterward, in their room, Graber said, "How come you never told me you knew him?"

"It's—it's hard to explain."

"Why?"

Her eyes looked everywhere except at him. "He—he's got a crush on me. He's been like that since I first met him. But he's so much younger than me. Still I could never make him see it like that."

"Why is he following us?"

Her eyes grew anguished. For a moment they stared into the distance, then returned. "He just can't get over my marrying you. But he means no harm."

"He's got a gun."

Her head dropped. Her fingers twined. "He won't do anything. You saw how quick he gave in when I asked him to. Please don't worry any more, dear." A sob racked her. "This isn't much of a honeymoon, is it?"

He felt the sadness start, and the futility, but, surprisingly, she came to him. She put her arms about him and her lips were warm and moist and strong on his. The sweetest joy he'd ever known sang in him. She did not resist his caresses. She made no protest. She accepted him but there was no eagerness, no answering rush, just passivity.

He lay there after, thinking and remembering, and soon the sadness came after all . . .

Another day, another dream ended. They did not speak much, only the essentials of conversation. He felt the gulf widen. He could see her across a vast distance. She was there, beyond his reach.

The dying of the day found them in the Ozarks, all sad and melancholy under a gray, dripping sky. The trees were barren of leaves, even of buds, as though reluctant to give birth to something whose life would be so brief and transient.

They had a cabin all to themselves, a lannonstone structure in a grove of cedars. This was honeymoon country, he thought with a taste of bitterness, a place of the bliss of first discovery and true intimacy. For him, however, it held only the gloom of disenchantment.

He had not seen the black and red Olds all day but that did not surprise him. After last night, Earl would be more discreet.

He watched her as she sat on the edge of the bed with her hands in her lap and a faraway look in her eyes. Her mouth was grave and mournful. He felt the resentment and irksomeness die and a tenderness, greater than he had ever known, came. He sat down beside her and took her hand in his. It was limp and cold.

"I love you, Hazel," he said. "I want to help you. Won't you tell me what it is?"

She looked down quickly and he saw her bite her lip. He expected tears but none came.

"You're in some kind of trouble. You're scared. I know you are. Won't you tell me?"

A tremor passed through her. He heard the sharp intake of her breath, like the forerunner of a sob. But beyond that she made no sound.

"I know it can't go on between us. I know it's over. But I still love you. I still want to help you."

"There never was anything," she said slowly, her voice hoarse with suppressed tears, "though I do love you now. But you see, Bill, I'm already married. And I love my husband very much. There isn't anything I wouldn't do for him."

He sat, stunned. Now he understood her reluctance. And last night she had submitted to his lovemaking to distract him from his questioning. Certain things had ceased to puzzle him, but not all.

"Is he—your husband—in trouble?"

She nodded. "They're holding him. They showed him to me, all beaten up and bloody. They said they'd kill him if I didn't do what they said."

"And what was that?" His lips moved stiffly. He was aware of a vile anger building up in him.

"They pulled a big jewel robbery. I've got the stones with me, in the lining of that bag you dropped. They're trying to smuggle them out of the country. The borders north and south of California are watched too closely. They figure on northern Minnesota where it's mostly wilderness.

"You were from northern Wisconsin. If you brought a wife back with you no one would suspect anything wrong, especially if you took your time and wandered about on an indirect route. They're to meet me there. Earl has followed us to keep an eye on me and the jewels."

This was what he'd had an inkling of all the while, the death and

dissolution of a dream. No wonder the sadness had been present.

"Why didn't you go to the police?"

"They'd kill Walt if I did that. Don't you understand? They'd kill him . . ."

All he could think of the next day was, Why couldn't I have been the lucky guy to earn a love like that? All through western Illinois, with the grass new and green under the warm spring sun, and then northward, through Wisconsin, he thought of nothing else. His heart ached. For a long time he did not care whether he lived or died.

The land turned brown and sere, the leftovers of autumn. There would be no green until a warm spring rain. The air turned chill. Here and there under the evergreens small patches of dirty snow could be seen.

The day was all but done when he turned wearily into the driveway to his place. The lake still held ice, cracked and heaving. There was something forlorn and woebegone about the shuttered cottages, the smokeless chimneys.

The car waiting for them did not surprise Graber. He had spied the tracks it had made in his unused driveway. The black and red Olds that suddenly appeared behind did not astonish him either.

He stopped his car and got out, aware that Hazel's face was pale and tight. He heard her sharp cry as the three men advanced. One of them held his arms out to her but she flinched.

"Walt?" she said, her voice uncertain and puzzled. "What is this, Walt?"

He was tall and tawny and bronzed. He threw a contemptuous look at Graber, then grinned at Hazel. Behind him, Graber heard the soft padding of Earl's steps as he came up.

"You made it, baby," the man called Walt said. "I knew you'd make it, if only we got you in the right mood."

"We?" she echoed. She looked with wide, frightened eyes from Walt to the other two, who held guns, and at Earl, then back at Walt. "What do you mean?"

This was Walt's moment of triumph. He had to savor it and brag. "It was me, baby, the brains behind everything. The heist was nothing. Getting the ice away from California was the big thing. And you did it, baby, with an assist from me."

"I—I don't understand. You were all—all beaten up and—"

"Ever hear of make-up, baby? And the light was poor. I'll explain everything, after this joker is taken care of."

"You aren't going to hurt him?" she cried. "He didn't do anything."

"He's seen us, baby," Walt said. "He can put the finger on us."

Earl's hands patted Graber. Then Earl said, "He's clean. But he had a gun the other night. Prob-

ably has it in his car right now."

"That's a good place for it," Walt said. He threw a glance at the lake. "We could shove him under the ice. What do you say?"

One of the men nodded and hefted his gun. "Should I let him have it here?" he asked.

"Make him walk to the lake," Walt said with a cruel, crooked grin. "Less to carry then."

Graber always remembered it afterward as a sort of nightmare. They'd turned careless because of his quiet submission, his air of accepted defeat. As he turned to go, Hazel cried out. She threw herself at him, holding him, detaining him, crying that she would not let them kill him.

Walt turned in sudden anger. He tore her from Graber and flung her roughly aside. She fell up against one of the gunmen and caromed off him to strike the other.

Graber leaped and caught hold of Walt. With a pull and a shove he sent Walt hurtling off-balance at one of his companions. The fellow's gun blasted and Walt screamed in pain. He smashed into the gunman and the two of them went down in a tangled heap.

The sudden turn of events stunned Earl and the other gunman. A pistol cracked but the bullet missed Graber who was moving fast. He gained the opposite side of the car. Hazel had left the door open. A bullet smashed the windshield as he reached in the glove compartment and came out with the .38.

Earl and his chum were in the open. They turned to run, seeking shelter. Graber stopped one with a slug in the shoulder and Earl with a broken leg. Graber whirled to face the third gunman who had gone down with Walt, but he had lost his pistol in falling and Hazel had it . . .

AMID THE REEK of gunpowder and the groans of Earl and the other wounded thug, Hazel's sobs were soft and barely audible. She looked from her dead husband to Bill Graber through tear-misted eyes.

"I'm not crying for him," she said to Graber. "Is that so awful? I'm crying for something that never was. Do you understand? Do I make sense?"

"I understand," Graber said quietly. "I understand everything now."

She came and stood beside him. Her sobs stilled. Her hand reached out and touched his, softly, timidly. He would have smiled at her but he had to hold the gun on the three men. Then he heard a shout and another, from the highway, and he knew he could soon relax.

"This is home, Hazel," he said. "This is our home . . ."

Crime with Filet Mignon by

**JOHN P. FORAN**

*It was a far from gentle killing, with a green-eyed dame in the middle. At least . . . it started off that way. Then it grew complex.*

# The Wife Killer

I HAD THE evening newspaper in my hands and the redhead on my mind, which was why I didn't hear Lieutenant Barney Jerome come into the detective room. Dave Brasher got busy torturing his typewriter. Pete Longo fussed with a clip-board. So Jerome said, "Marty!" loud enough to snap me out of it.

Jerome was thin and wiry, and when anything bothered him he could get a mean look in his eyes. He growled, "There's a drunk over in the *Castle Tavern* mumbling he killed his wife. Go over there and see if it's wishful thinking."

I folded the paper and got up, realizing I'd gone clear from the headlines to the sports page without absorbing a single word.

Grinning, Brasher ran a hand over his bald pate. "Wish I had a buck for every time I threatened to kill my wife."

"Hey, Lieutenant," Longo complained. "How come I never get a barroom brawl? Marty, bring back a container of scotch and soda, huh?"

Jerome ignored it. I felt his eyes boring into my back as I went out. He didn't know about the redhead, but if I didn't snap out of it soon, he was going to start asking some pointed questions.

And what could I say? That I'd met a girl with flaming red hair and big green eyes—I didn't know her name or where she lived, but I'd met her and now I was mooning about like a love-sick calf?

I climbed into the car and headed for the *Castle* over on Humber Avenue. Mike Walsh owned the place, a quiet Irishman who ran a quiet bar, so I didn't expect any trouble.

The redhead . . . I'd met her in the supermarket a couple of blocks from my apartment. I went there Saturday mornings when I was off duty and got breakfast things—bacon, eggs, butter, maybe a steak or two—and this Saturday morning, which was four weeks ago now, I bumped my wire wagon into hers. Accidentally—I usually do smart things by accident.

I said it was my fault. She insisted it was her fault, and I said, "I'll wrassle you for it." She laughed, and it seemed to break a lot of ice. Anyway, when I reversed my wagon and said, "May I go around with you?" she didn't object.

She was almost six feet tall, with nice flowing curves under a print dress. I've never seen a dame so beautifully stacked. She wasn't wearing a ring, and she carried a handbag slung from a shoulder strap, the initial J B in a sort of crest.

Every now and then her green eyes brushed over me, like she was turning the pages of a book to find out the plot. Like when she said, "Do you cook for your wife as well as shop?"

"I'm not married," I said hastily, "but, I bet it's just my luck that you are."

She shook her head. "I guess there aren't enough big men to go around."

I was big enough. I had her by four inches and about sixty pounds. But I had a beat-up face—football and boxing—that scared little kids. When she asked, "What do you do for a living?" I hesitated.

With my face, when I said I was a cop, people got the idea I was all bruiser and no brains, so I laughed and said, "Oh, I do odd jobs for a character named Barney Jerome."

She said she was a secretary. She told me about her boss, Randolph Newcomb. He was rich, handsome, cultured—it sounded like she was adding up all the things I lacked, and her voice was

so soft I thought of her sitting in this guy's lap while she took dictation—I hated him right off.

Still, as we drifted around the market, picking things off the shelves, we seemed to get along fine. I remember distinctly. I bent down and picked two small cans of evaporated milk, and when I straightened up she had changed. Her smile was gone. Her green eyes were cold.

"I've finished buying," she said, and walked away.

I felt like I'd fallen into the deep-freeze locker. "Hey, wait. You can't walk off now. I never met a woman like you—I mean, it's like I *did* meet you before, like I've always known you—"

"Do you want me to call the manager?" she said coldly. She really meant it. She didn't want any part of me.

We'd spent about ten minutes together, and four weeks later I could remember every second of it, the way her red hair curled about her smooth face, her laughter, her long curving body. In fact, it was getting so I couldn't sleep nights.

I stopped outside the *Castle* and checked the bar through the window. It seemed quiet. Three men at the far end of the bar were busy with buck dice. A couple just beyond the stick were talking over highballs. One lone man with his back to me. I pushed the door open and walked in.

Mike gave the nod to the guy alone, then drew a beer and came over. I said, "Thanks a lot, Mike." He nodded, drifted away.

I sipped the beer and examined the wife-killer's reflection in the mirror. He was in his forties, a well-fed pink face, expensive clothes. He appeared to be drunk, and there was a glazed look in his pale blue eyes. But people who stagger away from automobile crashes look that way, also people who commit crimes their conscious minds aren't capable of accepting.

After a moment he started whispering. "I hit her," he said, and his pudgy hands on the bar twitched, "hit her, hit her—" His short full mouth clamped down, became petulant. "I had to do it," he told himself. "I couldn't stand her any more, I couldn't go on living in that sterile house. That's why I planned it, I planned each little move over and over, and then I hit her with her own cane, hit her, hit her—"

I'd heard enough. He was too dazed, too wound up inside, it was more than wishful thinking. I showed my shield. "What's your name?" I demanded.

He didn't see the badge. He said, "Randolph Newcomb," and then his glazed eyes swung to me. "What?" he said vaguely. "What did you say?"

I held still. The redhead—she worked for a Randolph Newcomb. He was soft and plump and ex-

pensive, she was tall and beautiful. I'd seen couples like that, buyer and seller, in plush night clubs and swank hotels. Suddenly I wanted to smash his fat face in.

"How long have you been in love with your secretary?" I asked.

"Jan—you know Jan Baker?" He changed—almost like a child shifting from tears to a smile. "She's beautiful, isn't she? So lovely. I think I fell in love with Jan the first time I saw her, and when I held her in my arms—"

I gripped the bar with both hands. *The J B on the redhead's purse*—Jan Baker. I felt sick inside. "So you had to get rid of your wife," I said.

His pink face went blank.

I caught his arm. "Let's go."

He followed me out to the car. He didn't know where he was going and he didn't care. He climbed in and sat quietly all the way to the station. He spoke once. "Jan . . ." he whispered, "Jan, dearest."

"Shut up!" I rasped.

I left him at the desk and went in to Jerome's office. "Randolph Newcomb," I said, "lives out on Eldmere Road, and I think he really killed her."

"Eldmere Road?" Jerome's brows lifted. "Better go over there and check. I'll talk to Newcomb."

The house on Eldmere Road looked as expensive as Newcomb's clothes. Lots of long window lines and slab-like brick, very modern. I unlocked a two-toned door and stepped into the foyer. A luminous arrow showed the light switch, and indirect lights spread a soft luster through a spotless hall.

She was there, all right, crumpled at the foot of a circular iron stairway. Her head was in a peculiar position, her chin pressed hard against her chest. Her knees were drawn up to the hem of a twisted skirt, the top leg thinner and rising to a bony hip line. The top half of the cane lay at her feet, the bottom half beyond the stairs.

I went around and, through tangled graying hair, saw a thin sharp face that must have been just as cold when life pulsed through the body.

There was a long white envelope clutched in her right hand. I craned my neck and read the address: *Randolph Newcomb, Newcomb Mfg., 120 Broad St.* The return address: *Miss Jan Barker, Hollister Co., 60 Beaver Street.* It was postmarked by the downtown business postoffice three days ago.

I went through the house wondering why she'd held on to the letter while Newcomb was murdering her. To point the finger? Then why hadn't Newcomb destroyed the letter. And the different addresses. If Jan worked for Newcomb, where did the Hollister Company come in?

The rooms upstairs were large and expensively furnished, every-

thing painfully neat and orderly, the cold orderliness of a museum. But in Newcomb's bedroom—they'd occupied separate bedrooms—the bedspread and pillow held the press of a body, and two suits and a pair of slacks were heaped on the floor, the pockets turned out. As though Mrs. Newcomb had checked before sending them to the cleaners and came across Jan's letter.

I went back down the rear stairs and into a gleaming kitchen that lacked cooking odors. Behind the house Newcomb's car was nosed up hard against one side of the garage. He'd tried and missed.

Back in the hall I found a phone book and checked through it for Jan Baker's address. Hadley Avenue, and the number put it about six blocks north of my apartment. I called Jerome.

"You can notify Homicide," I told him. "She's dead—looks like he beat her to death with the cane some hours ago."

Jerome's grunt told me he'd had a time getting anything out of Newcomb. "Stay with it, Marty," he said. "I'll have some help over there in a minute."

I stayed with it, but not the way he meant. I left the front door unlocked and drove over to Hadley Avenue. An old story, old and sordid, and I kept telling myself I wanted at Jan, the chance to pay her back for all the sleep I'd lost, and yet I drove as though I couldn't wait another second to see her again.

I found her house, the name, *Baker,* in one of the brass name plates, and pressed the button. The door latch clicked immediately, and I rode a self-service elevator up six flights.

Jan held her door open, waiting anxiously, and every tense line told me she *knew,* and was expecting Newcomb. "Oh, it's you," she said, and wilted. She looked tired, there were shadows under her eyes, and yet she seemed prettier than I remembered.

"Me," I said. "May I come in?"

She hesitated, opened the door wide and I stepped into a living room that was a third as large as Newcomb's but three times more attractive. Jan took my hat and waved it at a chair. I watched her sit on the sofa and cross her long legs. She wore a faille taffeta, a black curve of breast, a slim waist, then sweeping over her hips.

Conscious of me staring, she said, "This isn't going to get us anywhere. I said good-bye and meant it." She pushed at her red hair with a tired gesture.

She looked so tired I found my voice gentle. "You still haven't told me why."

"You know why." Her voice stiffened. "I saw the gun under your shoulder when you bent down in the market. Odd jobs for Barney Jerome!"

"Hey, wait!" We were talking as though she'd just cut me dead in the market and I'd followed her home and was making another pitch. "Just who do you think I am?"

"A gangster." She lowered her lashes. "I'll forget after a while," she said in a low voice. "But in any case—" She looked at me squarely. "We have nothing to talk about."

"No?" I laughed out loud and then I was on my feet. Newcomb and the past four weeks were forgotten. Everything went before a sudden rush of relief. "Take a look, Red, a good look!"

She looked up from the shield cupped in my hand, pinking with embarrassment. She laughed shakily. "You're a policeman—? Oh, what must you think of me?"

"Here's what I think." I had her in my arms before she could recover, and then she didn't mind at all. "I don't blame you, I look like a gangster," I said, "with my nose flattened, scars over my eyes—"

"Not really, not when you smile. That's why I had to break it off quickly," she explained. "I tried so hard to forget."

"A wonder you didn't. I'm not rich, not cultured—" I stopped, remembering Newcomb, why I was there. I got her out of my arms then I backed away.

"So you have scruples," I said. "You wouldn't have any truck with a gangster. What about murderers?"

"Murderers—what do you mean?" *She knew.* It was in her eyes, her tense hands.

"Randolph Newcomb. He—"

"No, that's not true!" she said swiftly. "Randolph wouldn't do a thing like that! He wouldn't!" She was fighting something. She threw a frightened glance at the desk between the windows, jerked her eyes away.

I made a move toward the desk and it triggered her. She rushed to the desk, put her hands, her back to it. "Please don't look," she pleaded. "You don't know Randolph—you wouldn't understand."

She was terrified—or leading me into the next move in the case. Either way, I had to look.

"I'm broad-minded," I said, and eased her aside.

I found a plain white envelope on top of some pink stationery. Jan's name was scrawled in a strong flowing hand. I opened the envelope and read:

*Jan Dearest,*

*I just killed my wife. I planned it all last night, the method, the time, every detail before I went to sleep last night. I couldn't help myself.*

*I know this will be a shock to you, but I must tell you the truth, how I've let my love for you turn into hate for my wife. There's no use saying Laura cheated me—partly crippled,*

*childless, her love for inanimate things that couldn't betray her —she isn't to blame for the fact that I never knew what love was like until I met you. You showed me how wonderful love can be, how alive it can make a man feel—*

I skipped over the rest of it:

*Dear Jan, you are not to blame in any way . . . We'd better not see each other for a while . . . I'll see you are provided for . . .*

"I don't care what the letter says," said Jan, as I stuffed it back in the envelope. "I know Randolph; he couldn't kill anyone!"

"At this moment," I said, "his wife is lying at the foot of the stairs, with a broken neck."

She went white. She said dazedly, "I kept calling his office all afternoon. I called the *Oyster Grill* and they said he'd been drinking heavily. It worried me. Randolph seldom drinks. I called his home, but there wasn't any answer—"

"What time was that?"

"At five—just before I left the office."

"I thought you worked for Newcomb."

"I did." She ran a weary hand across her eyes. "Randolph was a very lonely man. He told me he'd fallen in love with me—I think he was afraid he would forget himself, and he did, one day last week. He felt terrible about it and promised it wouldn't happen again. That's why he got me the job with the Hollister Company."

"You taught him about love," I said. "Did you also plant the idea of killing his wife?"

"Please, it wasn't anything like that," she said, distressed. "Randolph must have been drunk. Sober he's too good, too kind and generous—"

"Yeah, generous enough to see you are provided for," I said, "and you were smart enough to get in the clear before—"

"You're hard," she said, "hard and brutal. You came here and lied to me, and now you're going to persecute that poor man—"

I grabbed up my hat. "Keep on telling yourself that," I said harshly, "it might salve your conscience while you spend his dough." I slammed out of the apartment.

I sat in the car and, mad as I was, I wanted to believe her. I told myself she wasn't cold-blooded, she wasn't calculating. She could have worked herself into the deal without admitting it to herself. Ditto for Newcomb. His love for Jan threw him into a wind-ding, and in spite of himself, he'd planned his wife's death.

And then Laura came across the letter from Jan and busted it wide open. Newcomb killed his wife in a drunken rage, and now he was trapped in the web of wishful thinking he'd woven.

My hands shifted on the wheel. I wanted to go back up there and take Jan in my arms and tell her it wasn't her fault. I would protect her—That did it. That was the way Newcomb had destroyed himself. I got the car started and drove back to Eldmere Road, fast.

The Homicide men were busy with cameras, tape measures and fingerprint equipment. The medical examiner, finished with the body, was filling out his report. Jerome was talking to Lieutenant Mueller when I came in. He broke it off, scowling, and turned to me. I flashed Jan's letter before he could sound off.

He read it, passed it to Mueller. "Why didn't you bring her in?"

I shrugged. "The letter clears her," I said, and added, "What about the one in Mrs. Newcomb's hand?"

Mueller said, "A pretty thank-you note for getting this Jan a new job—and this letter explains her reference to—" He grinned. "—the little love scene in the office. A smart dame," he said.

Jerome didn't say anything, and I felt his eyes boring me as I picked up the broken cane and examined it. I knew what he was thinking. Jan was smart and I knew it and was keeping her clear for what I could get out of her. It annoyed me.

The cane was a good one, made of spliced ash with a curved gold-studded handle. There was a fresh V-groove across it just above the rubber tip. Another, deeper groove on the other side about eight inches nearer the break. I stared at the stairs.

The examiner snapped his book shut and picked up his bag. "What time was she killed?" I asked.

"Before or about five," he said, bored with the repetition. "The cane, a blow on the right side of the head, the neck broken that way."

"A sharp blow, or a weight pressure?"

He glanced back at the body. "Could be," he said, nodding. "The damage went deep. It had to be a heavy blow."

"Thanks, Doc," I said, and went back to Jerome. "Would you come back to the station with me?" I asked.

"Why?" he said flatly. "What is it?"

"I'm not sure." He was annoyed with me, and I knew what he would say if I put it into words. I was afraid I would feel the same way. "I want to ask Newcomb one question, and I'd like you to be there."

Mueller saved me. His eyes swung to the cane. "We might as well," he said. "We're about through here." He wanted in on it.

I sweated the drive back to the station. In the detention room, Newcomb was slumped in a chair,

staring blankly at the floor. He didn't hear us come in. I sweated some more. If Jan had suckered Newcomb into this, I was playing the same sucker's game, and if—if—if my question missed fire, Jerome was going to swarm all over me.

"Well?" he glared. "Ask your question."

"Newcomb." I put a hand on his shoulder, and when he looked up, I asked, "When did you first kill your wife?"

His pale blue eyes remained dazed.

"Hit her," I said. "You hit her and hit her. When did you first hit her?"

His lips moved jerkily. "Last night. I couldn't sleep. I kept hitting—"

Jerome stifled a curse, grabbed my arm and hustled me into his office. He went around his desk and slammed into the chair. "We don't work together in this precinct, Mueller," he said, giving me a mean eye. "Each man thinks he's a one-man detective squad—" He slammed a fist down on the desk. "Now spill it," he said angrily. "What kind of a fast shuffle are you trying to pull?"

"You got the picture most of the way," I said. "Newcomb falling in love with his secretary, Jan Baker. He forgot himself and made a pass at her. He solved that by getting her another job. But there was another angle. His resentment against his frigid wife. He got to hate her so much he couldn't help planning her death. It preyed on his mind, and he tried to forget by drinking. He arrived home drunk—"

"The car smack up against the garage?" said Mueller.

I nodded gratefully. "Newcomb must have staggered up the back stairs and flopped into bed. Maybe he dozed off, maybe drunk as he was he couldn't sleep. Anyway, he got up and went down the front way, probably for another drink, and saw his wife lying there, the cane broken in two. It fitted his plans, and he was so fogged with drink he thought he'd killed her. He wandered out and wound up in the *Castle* mumbling he'd killed his wife.

"But here's what happened," I went on. "Before Newcomb got home his wife went through his soiled suits and came across Jan's letter. It upset her. She rushed out of the room and started down the stairs. She tripped. The cane fell out of her hand and caught between the iron bannister rungs. She fell head-first against the cane, it broke her neck, the weight of her body broke the cane, and she stumbled to the bottom of the stairs."

Jerome stared at me, digesting it.

"We noticed the marks on the cane," Mueller said to Jerome.

"They're spaced to fit the iron uprights."

That helped a lot. "Give me an hour," I said. "I think I can prove her death was accidental."

Jerome started another fast question. "Okay, you're a one-man detective squad." He grinned. "Clean it up, Marty. We don't want a false murder rap marked up against us. Oh, Marty," he called as I started out, "is she pretty?"

"Pretty?" I said. "Man, she's gorgeous!"

I drove over to Hadley Avenue, and my heart purred like the motor. Jan wasn't pleased to see me, but I'd expected that. I took her cold, "Have you returned to arrest me as an accomplice?"

I ignored that and asked, "What time did you receive that letter from Newcomb?"

She hesitated warily. "A few minutes after noon. Randolph's office boy brought it over. You can ask the boy—"

It was what I wanted, solid, concrete proof. "Okay, call me all the names you want," I said. "Mrs. Newcomb's death was accidental."

"Oh, I knew it!" Color swept into her cheeks. Her green eyes glowed. "Randolph is too fine a man to do such a horrible thing!"

She was so relieved, so happy; suddenly I felt low and empty. It hadn't occurred to me she was in love with Newcomb. Yeah, he was rich, handsome, cultured—

She said, "Was it you who found out?"

I nodded slowly.

"Why?" She came close, looked up smiling.

"You know why," I said, annoyed. "You don't have to rub it in."

"Tell me." She came so close our bodies touched.

"All right!" I said angrily, and I crushed her against me. Her gasp turned into a laugh. I kissed her and told her how much sleep I'd lost thinking about her. How much I loved her.

"We're mad," she said. "Here I am in your arms and I don't even know your name."

"Rice," I said, "Marty Rice—like at weddings."

She laughed. "Marty, throw a little rice at me now."

---

A CORNELL WOOLRICH SHORT NOVEL NEXT MONTH

---

# ONE EVERY MINUTE

The way it looked . . . the driver would be pushing up daisies

*By* JOHN DAVID

IT'S AN easy-take set-up, just made to order for me. No car at the pumps, and the old man's alone inside. I walk in and he's sitting on a box reading a comic book. I walk straight over to him. I take the snub-nose .32 out of my pocket and his eyes go wide just for a second before I lay it over his ear. He don't make a sound. He just sort of folds up and lays down on the floor. Then I close

© 1958, by John David

the front door and turn the fly-specked cardboard sign, so that it reads *closed* from the outside.

I ring up a *no sale* on the cash register, pocket the money, and walk out the back door.

In five minutes flat I'm a hundred yards up the road, thumbing a ride. I ain't counted the money yet but I figure it comes to about a hundred bucks. That's twenty bucks a minute, which is big-time dough it you make a point of clocking your take.

I watch ten, twelve cars go by. Then this new Buick rounds the curve and I'm ready. I step to the edge of the highway and start limping.

It works. I hear the Buick start to slow down. In another ten seconds it passes me and stops. Man, that car is sharp. Two-tone green and shiny new. With a heap like that a guy could drag the witches right out of their shoes.

Later, I tell myself. No time for dreaming now. I put on a tired look, screw up my face like I'm in pain, and step up to the window. I talk like I'm ready to drop.

"Thanks a lot, Mister. I been walking all day. You going to Greenville?"

"I sure am, sonny. Hop in."

I walk around to the other side and get in. The Buick eases back into the speed lane and takes off like a jet. Then I start sizing up the guy. He's about forty. A big buy. Real confident-looking. Too bad, but I don't let it throw me.

In no time at all we're hitting seventy, smooth and easy.

I don't see no point in waiting, so I take the .32 out and shove it in the guy's side. I watch his eyes go big and scared, and I get a charge all over. I'm really floating.

"Hello sucker," I say, real soft.

The guy swallows a couple of times, but he don't turn his head.

"What's the gag, sonny?" he asks.

"It's no gag, mister. And don't call me sonny. This rod makes me bigger than you."

He tries to grin, but it comes out sick. "I guess it does, at that. What do you want?"

"That's more like it." I keep the gun-pressure firm. "First, you're going to turn this heap up one of these side roads where it's nice and private. Then you're going to be real polite and give me your dough. After that, I'll be on my way. Driving me a new Buick, of course."

"What about me?" he asks, with a quiver in his voice.

I let him worry a minute before I answer. "Well now, that's the sad part, mister. I just held up a filling station about three miles back and I got a lot of miles to cover. I'd be a sucker to leave you running around loose, and able to finger me—wouldn't I? And mister, if there's one thing I ain't, it's a sucker."

He turns two shades whiter, and I see the sweat popping out over his eyes. I just sit there soaking it up. He tries to say something, but it don't come out.

"So now," I go on, "suppose you start easing up on the gas, so we can find us that little side road."

Only he don't. I watch his eyes go narrow and his fingers get tight on the wheel. He hits the gas and we're doing eighty.

I shove the .32 in his side. "Don't get funny, mister. Slow this crate down, or I'll open your gut right here."

His face is pale, stretched. He shakes his head.

"If you pull that trigger I'll still have time to jerk the wheel. If you think you can walk away from the wreck, go ahead and shoot."

I called his bluff. "Don't be a fool. I don't want to kill you. I just wanted to scare you so you wouldn't give me no trouble. And I don't think you'll commit suicide either. A guy with a car like this must have plenty of dough. You got too much to live for."

Now we're hitting ninety and the speedometer is still climbing. I don't feel too good.

"That's where you're wrong, sonny. I've got nothing to lose. Not a thing."

I'm all mixed up. "Meaning what?" I ask him.

"There's a letter in my coat pocket. Read it."

I keep an eye on him and reach into his pocket. I pull out an unsealed envelope. I back off to the other side where he can't grab the rod, and I take out a paper. The letterhead says 'City Memorial Hospital' and the page is full of two-dollar words I don't dig. But it ends up telling plain out that a Mr. J. L. Harper has cancer real bad and will be lucky if he lives two months.

"I want to thank you for the idea," he's telling me. "I have a wife and family and my insurance carries double indemnity for accidental death."

I get knots in my stomach. Of all the suckers on the whole damn highway, I have to pick one who's ready to drop dead! I try to reason with him.

"Okay, mister. Looks like I made a mistake. Let's make a deal. Just slow down and let me out. You keep your dough and your heap. How does that suit you?"

But I'm boiling. Who does this joker think he is? I tell myself the minute he slows down he finds out. He finds out good.

Only he ain't buying. Maybe he reads me. He just shakes his head and clamps down on the wheel a little harder. We're doing over ninety now. We pass a truck, WHOOM, like it's backing up. I feel cold sweat under my arm. My collar's choking me. I jerk it loose. It don't help. I think about yank-

ing the door open and taking a dive, then get a picture of what I'd look like when I stop rolling. Of all the lousy stinking breaks!

I guess I fold. I'm so scared when it comes out, I'm screaming. "Please, mister. For crissake, slow down. I ain't done nothing to you. All I done was stick up a crummy filling station. Please, mister. *Please!*"

"Put the gun on the seat," he tells me.

I drop the rod like it's hot. He reaches over, takes it and pulls it in his coat pocket.

"Now turn around, face the door, and put your arms out the window. Way out."

I don't dig him, but I do like he says. I put both arms out like I'm reaching for a road sign. Then *bang!* The glass shoots up. I jerk my head back to keep it from breaking my nose.

The window digs into my arms, just above the elbows. and I'm pinned like a rat between it and the top of the frame. It hurts like hell. I get to my knees on the seat to ease the strain. My head's all sideways, pushing against the top. I can't move without tearing an arm off.

The Buick slows down to sixty and I start breathing again. At least I'm living. I'm no sucker. So I cop a plea. What's a couple of years?

I start laughing. The guy looks at me like I'm crazy.

"You played it real cool, mister, but I wouldn't trade places with you. All I want to know is where they're going to bury you. When I get out I want to come and spit on your grave."

"I don't understand," he tells me.

"I mean—so what if I do a little stretch? I still got all the time in the world. You got two months. They're digging your grave right now, mister."

"Oh, you mean the letter. I'm afraid you jumped to the wrong conclusion there. That is a pathologist's report on a patient of mine. You see, I'm not the patient. I'm the doctor!"

It takes me a minute to soak it up. Then I curse him until I'm out of breath. He don't say nothing.

The Buick slows down and eases over in front of a drive-in. The guy opens the door and steps out.

He nods at me, quiet like.

"I'd better make a phone call," he says. "Don't go away . . . sucker!"

## *Yes!* YOU GET $17.70 WORTH OF EXCITING MYSTERIES AT ONCE—FREE!

**Including 3 Perry Mason Hits by ERLE STANLEY GARDNER**

YES—*while the supply lasts*—YOU can get $17.70 worth of top-notch NEW detective books, including 3 of the latest hits by Erle Stanley Gardner. Not one . . . not two . . . but a thrilling feast of SIX best-selling baffiers — *in regular, hard-bound covers.* On this amazing offer, ALL SIX are *delivered right to your door* in one giant package — FREE!

We make this generous offer to demonstrate the many advantages you enjoy as a member of the Detective Book Club.

### *Take ONLY The Books You Want*

Club selections are ALL newly published books. As a member, you get THREE of them complete in one handsome volume (a $7 to $8.50 value) for only $2.29. You do NOT have to take a volume every month. You receive a free copy of the Club's "Preview," which will fully describe all coming selections and you may reject any volume in advance. You need NOT take any specific number of books — only the ones you want. NO money in advance; NO membership fees. You may cancel membership any time you please.

### *You Enjoy These Five Advantages*

(1) You get the cream of the finest BRAND-NEW detective books—by the best authors. (2) You save TWO-THIRDS the usual cost. (3) You take ONLY the books you want. (4) The volumes are fresh and clean —delivered right to your door. (5) They are so well printed and bound that they grow into a library you'll be proud to own.

### *Mail Postcard for 6 FREE Books*

SEND NO MONEY. Simply mail postcard promptly, and we will send you at once — FREE — the six complete mystery thrillers described here, together with the current triple-volume containing three other complete new detective books. Clip the valuable postcard now, and mail it at once to:

**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB, Roslyn, L. I., N.Y.**

**ALL SIX BOOKS FREE** **SEND NO MONEY—JUST MAIL POSTCARD** 57

**MAIL THIS POSTCARD NOW FOR YOUR SIX FREE BOOKS**

•

**NO POSTAGE NEEDED**

HQ

**DETECTIVE BOOK CLUB**
**Roslyn, L. I., New York**

Please enroll me as a member and send me FREE, in regular hard covered publisher's editions, the SIX full-length mystery novels pictured on this page. In addition send me the current triple-volume, which contains three *other* complete detective books.

I am not obligated to take any specific number of volumes. I am to receive an advance description of all forthcoming selections and I may reject any book before or after I receive it. I may cancel my membership whenever I wish.

I need send no money now, but for each volume I decide to keep I will send you only $2.29, plus a few cents mailing charges as complete payment within one week after I receive it. (*Books shipped in U.S.A. only.*)

Mr. }
Mrs. } .....
Miss }
(PLEASE PRINT PLAINLY)

Address .....

Zone No.
City .....(if any).....State.....

# Giant Gift Package of New Smash-Hit Mysteries!

# FREE ALL 6

TO NEW MEMBERS

## BAFFLING MYSTERIES!

*Including 3 of the Latest PERRY MASON Hits by*

## ERLE STANLEY GARDNER

*Plus* Thrillers by MANNING COLES • MICHAEL UNDERWOOD • THE GORDONS

### 6 Full-Size Hard-Cover Books — All Complete

**1 THE CASE OF THE DARING DECOY**
**by Erle Stanley Gardner**

Perry Mason's client says he's being FRAMED on a murder charge. He insists a girl named Rosalind can clear him. But Perry finds her MURDERED!

**2 THE CASE OF THE SCREAMING WOMAN**
**by Erle Stanley Gardner**

A tape recording of the murdered man's voice names Mason's client, Mr. Kirby, as the killer. How can Perry prove he ISN'T GUILTY—with a *piano*, a *cat*, and a *goldfish*?

**3 THE CASE OF THE LUCKY LOSER**
**by Erle Stanley Gardner**

Everybody is convinced Perry's client is GUILTY—even the client HIMSELF. Perry has only one chance in a million to win—with a CORPSE that has been buried TWO YEARS!

**4 DEATH OF AN AMBASSADOR**
**by Manning Coles**

Tommy Hambledon was sure the way to round up the gang who killed a South American Ambassador was to go after them one by one. But each turned out to be—A CORPSE!

**5 CAPTIVE**
**by The Gordons**

TWO killers hold pretty Ruth Madison as a hostage. One is seriously wounded. The other waits eagerly for him to die. But Ruth knows her life depends on *keeping both ALIVE!*

**6 MURDER ON TRIAL**
**by Michael Underwood**

As the No. 1 juror takes his seat a gun roars in FULL VIEW—yet without anybody seeing who fired it. And then *the man on trial for murder* — FALLS DEAD!

**A $17.70 VALUE**

Postage Will be Paid by Addressee

No Postage Stamp Necessary If Mailed in the United States

**BUSINESS REPLY CARD**

First Class Permit No. 47 — Sec. 34.9 — P. L. & R. — Roslyn, N. Y.

## Detective Book Club

Roslyn, L. I.

New York

**DON'T MISS OUT ON THIS SENSATIONAL OFFER!**

•

**MAIL POSTCARD AT ONCE!**

*—Continued on Inside Cover*